

FIRST LOOK: TYRANTS OF THE UNDERDARK STRATEGIES

DRAGON+

The greatest D&D
entertainers talk
dream streams

SECRETS OF THE CELEBRITY DMs

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ISSUE 7



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Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 7

I have a confession to make. I currently spend more time watching other people play D&D than I do playing it.



Dice, Camera, Action: D&D as Entertainment

Superstar DMs Chris Perkins, Matthew Mercer, Nadja Otikor,



Ten Must Play Quests in Siege of Dragonspear

Alveus Malcanter, that most major of the modern minor mages, reflects on the many achievements that the hero of Baldur's Gate might accomplish in Siege of Dragonspear, the recent expansion to the Baldur's Gate video game series.

Adam Koebel, and Steve Lumpkin on creating the dream streams that entertain the masses.



Adventurers beware, though! These quests may have words that glimpse the future for your hero (i.e. SPOILERS!).



First Look: Tyrants of the Underdark Strategies

Developers Yoni Skolnik and Andrew Veen share their pro tips to help you crush your enemies and rule the Underdark.



Neverwinter's Massively Multiplayer Dungeon Master



Making Madam Eva

As a Dragon+ reader, we'd wager you cast an occasional glance at the official D&D Twitter account. Being the sort

Celebrity DM Chris Perkins brings the D&D tabletop experience into the MMORPG video game.

of inquisitive person you are, you probably looked at the tweet pinned at the top of that page and gave it a cheeky retweet to see what happens. The result? A personalized fortune from Barovia's foremost Vistani diviner, Madam Eva.



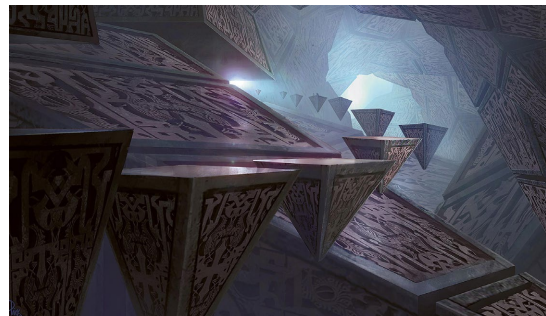
Imagining the Ampersand

Dragon+ cover artist Goñi Montes on female DMs, battle-hardened ballerinas and teenage darkness.



Unearthed Arcana: Gothic Heroes

Mike Mearls discusses new character options that are fitting for the world of Ravenloft.



Plane Shift: Zendikar



Community: Is No Fun, Is No Blinsky!

Gadof Blinsky is Vallaki's toymaker and the town's self-proclaimed "wizard of tiny wonders." He has been consumed by despair because no one seems to like him or want his toys. His fascination for eerie playthings causes most Barovians to avoid him.

Set your Dungeons & Dragons campaign in the world of Zendikar with this all-new resource.



A "Nightmare" to Sculpt



Sage Advice

Jeremy Crawford chairs the monthly column that gives

The Gale Force Nine team gets its teeth into the Count and his Nightmare steed.

official clarifications of D&D rules and provides reference documents to help your D&D game run smoothly. What's the first rule of Sage Advice? The Dungeon Master—not this column or the rulebooks—is the game's adjudicator.



Tavern Tales

Mike Mearls and Chris Lindsay highlight a few of the best articles to appear in the Dungeon Masters Guild.



Streaming Highlights

Dice, Camera, Action kicks off a new campaign led by Chris Perkins, the D&D art team goes green, and office life mirrors game life in Rolling High.

Return To Ravenloft

Your indispensable guide to the locations and challenges within Curse of Strahd.

Next Issue: Dragon 08

There's no need to cast Divination to discover next issue's goodies: we speak to

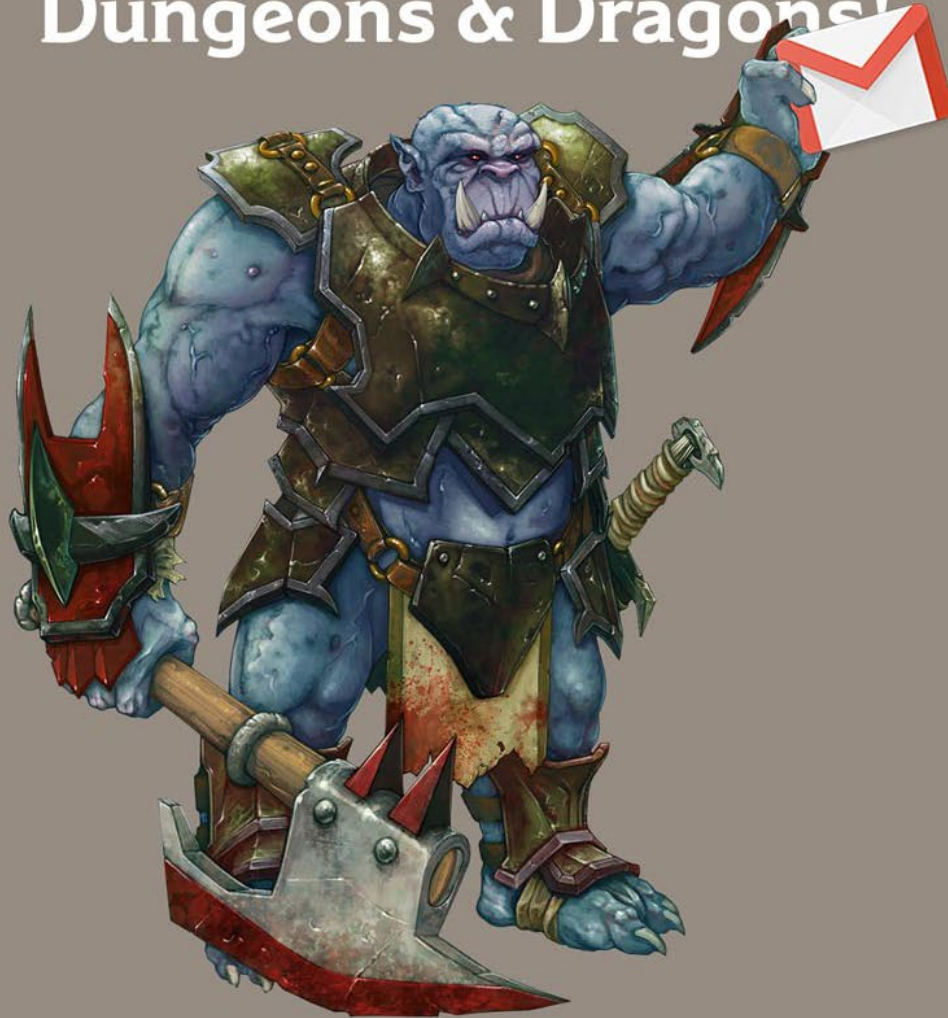
Forgotten Realms creator Ed Greenwood about his latest novel, remember Dungeons & Dragons videogames gone by and dig deep into the latest action RPG Sword Coast Legends.



A big thank you to the extended D&D family for their help with the creation of this issue.

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Welcome to Dragon+ Issue 7

I have a confession to make. I currently spend more time watching other people play D&D than I do playing it.

Matt Chapman

Like all secrets, now this admission is finally out there, it doesn't feel so bad—especially as my weekly viewing habit currently eats up around 16 hours. Even though my regular game takes up a whole evening, there's no way it could compete with that (plus the snack bill would likely double if we extended my game further, and it's already worryingly close to the GDP of a small European country).



Besides, there's never been a better time to enjoy the exploits of online DMs and their parties of adventurers. Twitch channels light up the weekly schedule, with our own *Dice, Camera, Action* and the Yogscast *High Rollers* series being two entertaining examples amid a sea of top quality games we highlight this issue. And if you miss the live games on Twitch, you can always catch episodes of the *Heroes of Awesome* on

YouTube.

To celebrate this golden age of streaming, *Dragon+* pulled some of

today's greatest practitioners away from their cameras to tell us what it's like to be Dungeon Masters with an audience beyond their table. Head to page four to get the advice you need to emulate their heroic deeds.

The screen gazing doesn't end there, and we're sure you'll appreciate some of our other eye-popping experiences. First Alveus Malcanter, that most major of the modern minor mages, helps us uncover the missions you *absolutely* have to play in *Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear*. Then we also hear from superstar DM Chris Perkins about his appearance in the Neverwinter MMORPG, as part of its yearly meta-masterpiece *Respen's Marvelous Game*. As ever, he's quite the "fun guy."

With all those audiovisual delights (and that's before we deliver this month's collection of Video & Audio Highlights, see page 23), we're thinking we might need to rethink our snack situation entirely. Can someone pass the popcorn?

Matt Chapman, Editor-in-Chief

[Email Matt](#)



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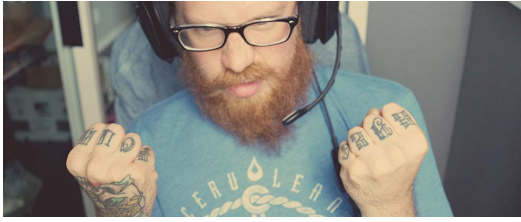


Dice, Camera, Action: D&D as Entertainment

Superstar DMs Chris Perkins, Matthew Mercer, Nadja Otikor, Adam Koebel, and Steve Lumpkin on creating the dream streams that entertain the masses.

Dice, Camera, Action. It's no wonder the latest Dungeons & Dragons official online game riffs off a phrase traditionally used to signal the start of filming on a movie. The rise of services

such as Twitch and the willingness of audiences to engage with D&D live streams has elevated some shared games to the same level as mainstream visual entertainment.



“What really draws people into watching a stream of any roleplaying game is the same as any good TV show or movie; people come for the interactions between those characters and to

watch them develop,” says **Adam Koebel**, the GM for *RollPlay: Mirrorshades* and *RollPlay: Swan Song*, and the writer of *Dungeon World*. “They want to see what’s going to happen, and they come with this sense of wonder. And, like a lot of good media, there’s this sense of danger in most games—Dungeons & Dragons especially—that a character could just take a bad hit from a goblin and disappear forever. So there’s a sense of tension that draws people to these shows.”

“Putting our D&D game on the internet was interesting because we got audience feedback from people who were now getting invested in these stories and these characters that *we’d* been so invested in this whole time,” adds voice actor Matthew Mercer, who DMs the *Critical Role* series.



Nadja Otikor, Dungeon Master for *Missclicks Prophecy*, goes a step further and confirms the draw that engaging characters can have. When one of her favorite *Hearthstone* players was invited to play D&D on itmeJP’s **Twitch channel**, she decided to tune in. “Before that, I probably had the same sort of misconceptions that a lot of people have about D&D. I saw people sitting around a table, taking copious notes on paper that had all of these boxes on it. It was like watching people do taxes with dice,” she says. “That particular streamed episode a dwarf cleric, whose main goal was to be legendary, decided to challenge an owlbear solo. The player was super into it, despite everybody else trying to talk him out

of it. He was whole hog, fully in character, shouting in his mic, ‘I can do it!’ And he got torn to shreds. I was like, ‘Wow. Nobody acts like this when they do their taxes!’ So it shattered all my misconceptions and I was really caught by the narrative and the enthusiasm of the players.”

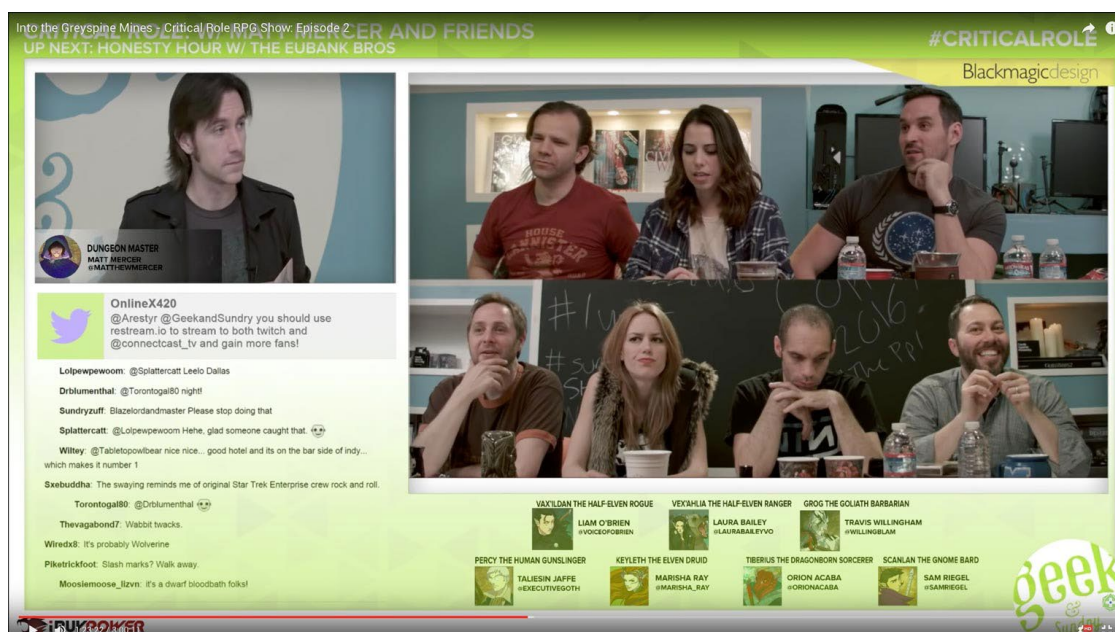


One of the worries many people may have before sharing their home game with the world is that, along the way, the dynamic might change. Otikor says that’s less of an issue for players in the game. “My observation as someone who is able to ask a DM questions about a session, is that the players’ approach to roleplay doesn’t change for a streaming game. So if you have that chaos player, who

given the choice between right or left will start digging a hole, they’re still going to act like that regardless of the audience,” she says.

Yet when it comes to whether a DM changes their approach for a live stream, opinions differ. Mercer was convinced to stream the game he ran for other voice actors when Felicia Day offered them a slot on her channel Geek & Sundry. But he says they were careful going into it, because they were effectively taking a very private thing and making it public.

“When you take something very important to you and you put it on the internet, it’s like setting it up for a firing squad. But we felt as long as we didn’t have to change the game or cater to the media and could continue unscathed with cameras in the room, we’d agree to do it. And that’s how it happened,” he remembers.



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“It was a little scary at first. We were worried that having the cameras there and knowing we’re on a set would make us more aware. While there was a little bit of an adjustment period, for the most part it didn’t change the dynamic. After the first ten minutes getting used to it, we were back in our imaginations, and the setting we were sitting in didn’t make any difference.”

In contrast to that, Koebel says he “absolutely” changes his technique when he’s streaming: “I’ve noticed that my DM style has gone from using much more informal descriptions to an almost cinematographer-like description. I can then impart a shared, imagined visual experience to the audience. I might have dabbled with that before, but it’s really become a big part of my DM’s toolkit, the idea that we have an audience to play to.”

Steven Lumpkin, who DMs *The West Marches* but also plays in Koebel’s *Swan Song* adventure, has in turn been influenced by that cinematic storytelling. “I love adding scenes that the audience, which includes the players, can see, but which the characters don’t know about. Or taking a moment in combat and describing it with cinematic flair,” he says. “I’ve



even implemented a twist on the inspiration rules, which allows players to have their own cinematic character moments. All of this is intended to give viewers at home a more radio-play kind of experience.”

THE BASICS

Taking the decision to move a home game online may, in some cases, vastly expand its audience, but Dungeon Masters still need to deliver on the basics. Celebrity DM Chris Perkins says a streamed D&D adventure has to satisfy the needs of both the DM and the players, regardless of those wider viewers.

“If a group likes lots of roleplaying, the adventure should contain lots of roleplaying opportunities. When I create adventures, I try to include stuff for all classes to do. It also helps to have a compelling plot, with goals that motivate the players and their characters,” Perkins says. “It’s also important not to stifle new players’ creativity or imagination. As a DM, if I see a player doing too much ‘coaching’ of another player, I’ll say something like, ‘But ultimately it’s your decision’ or ‘What would *you* like to do?’”



Koebel agrees that you need to engage your players, and feels a lot of DMs on Twitch are developing those general storytelling skills, as they realize there's an audience of thousands of people watching them craft a tale. "You need to ask questions such as, 'What is your character thinking about?' and 'How does your character feel?', or 'What do you do in response?' Rather than your go-to question being, 'What's the next action you take?'"



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TOP TIP: SOUND

Looking to start a campaign without the cam pain? When we asked our experts to offer tips for those new to livestreaming, one stood out in particular.

"Audio is the best 'low hanging fruit' for improving your streams," advises Lumpkin. "So get everyone on board with good quality sound. The Blue Yeti microphone is a strong introductory purchase, and your audience will appreciate it." "I can't emphasize enough how much you need proper audio equipment," agrees Mercer. "Presentation is tremendously altered by audio.

Even in the first few episodes of Critical Role, we were still ironing out the kinks. But it made the difference. Having clear audio and having the audience being able to understand and hear what's going on is so important in a storytelling medium. If you can't hear the story, you're just watching people sit around a

table.”

As with a regular tabletop experience, DMs sharing a game on a live stream also need to remember the basic skills. The most important of these, our experts agree, is the ability to improvise.

“If the DM is simply sitting down to make his players go through an adventure from point A to point Z, then it’s a little linear and can feel predictable. This is as true for playing Dungeons & Dragons at a table as it is for playing with an audience, because when you’re playing with your friends, your friends are the audience too,” Koebel says. “What really makes for a good DM, especially in a streamed environment, is a degree of improvisational talent. The ability to look at what’s going on at the table and see what the players are interested in, and be able to craft the narrative around that. Because interested players are going to be engaging players for the audience.”



One of the most widely acclaimed DMs when it comes to improvisation suggests this is a skill you can learn as you progress. “I’ve never read a book about improv,” admits Perkins. “It’s something I’ve gotten better at over the years through practice. I’ve been DMing since I was ten or eleven, and it took a while for it to click. Yet over the years, the amount of prep time has slowly decreased, and the amount of ‘winging it’ has steadily increased.”

Lumpkin, meanwhile, uses a slightly different tactic to get similar results. His current campaign, *Rollplay: The West Marches*, is a

‘sandbox’ adventure, without any GM-driven story. Instead he populates his world with a number of threats that are pursuing their own agendas.



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“I then let my players define what they engage with and how,” he explains. “These usually involve both risks and rewards. I also like to allow the threats they interact with to threaten them back, and put recurring pressure on them as they pursue their goals.”

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

In outlining his pre-game rituals, Perkins describes how refreshing his memory of the previous session, by writing a short recap for the players, helps him “get on the right page.” However, sharing an adventure with an extended audience online also brings some unexpected benefits with it. One of those is help remembering things that might otherwise slip by.

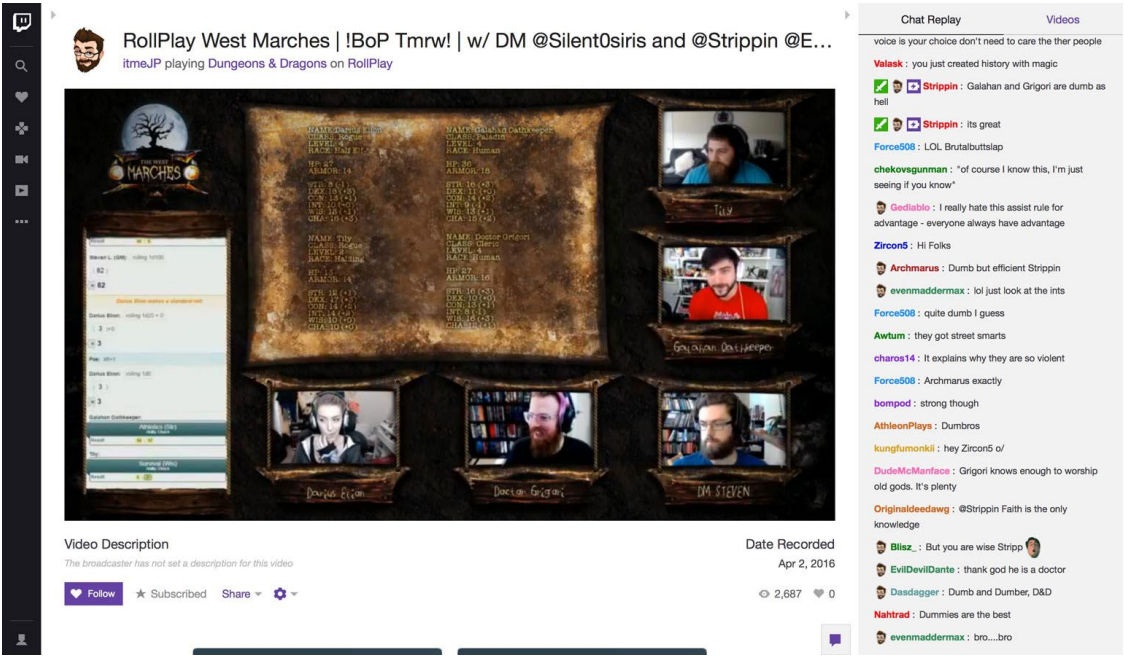
“Having the internet be there is like having the little Microsoft paperclip saying, ‘Hey, did you remember about this important check?’ ‘Did you remember that guy had disadvantage?’ It’s interesting to have that feedback loop after each episode and it’s been very helpful. Partly in letting us know how many people are actually interested in our game,” Mercer says.



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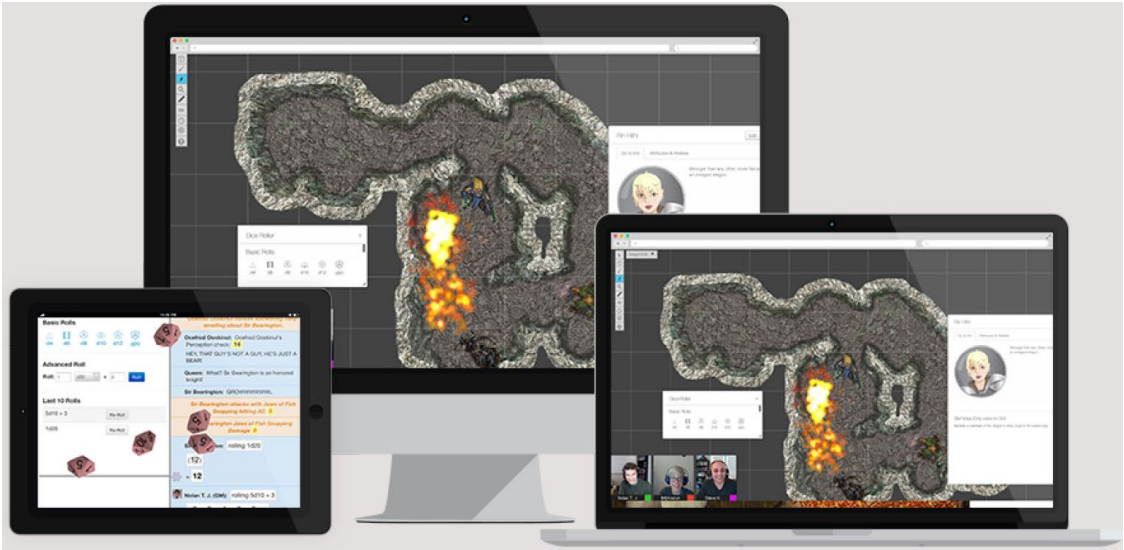
Koebel adds that feedback is even useful when you're running something as straightforward as an adventure module series, like *The Lost Mines of Phandelver* in the *D&D Starter Set*. "The audience has a degree of input between episodes that you wouldn't otherwise have," he says. "Some offline gaming groups will have a post-game discussion but that will be pretty quick or not too detailed. With an audience, especially one who's *only* job at the table is to watch and absorb, you get a lot more feedback and that gives you so much more to work with the next time you come to the table."

While he doesn't often engage with the chat during play, often only checking it during breaks, Koebel says those fans can help you out: "Someone will know the answer if I can't remember where we last saw an NPC," he reveals.



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While the DMs we spoke to seemed grateful to the audience for the help they offered, none of them wanted to be held to task by rules lawyers. That’s partly because one of the fundamental requirements for having a popular live stream is that you keep things moving. “I’m more focused on the narrative, and there’ll be certain scenarios where I won’t recall the specific rules in the book,” says Mercer. “Instead of bogging down the stream spending three minutes going through the tome and trying to find a specific ruling, sometimes I’ll just make a judgement call at that point. That helps keep the audience engaged, and doesn’t slow down the action of the current narrative.”

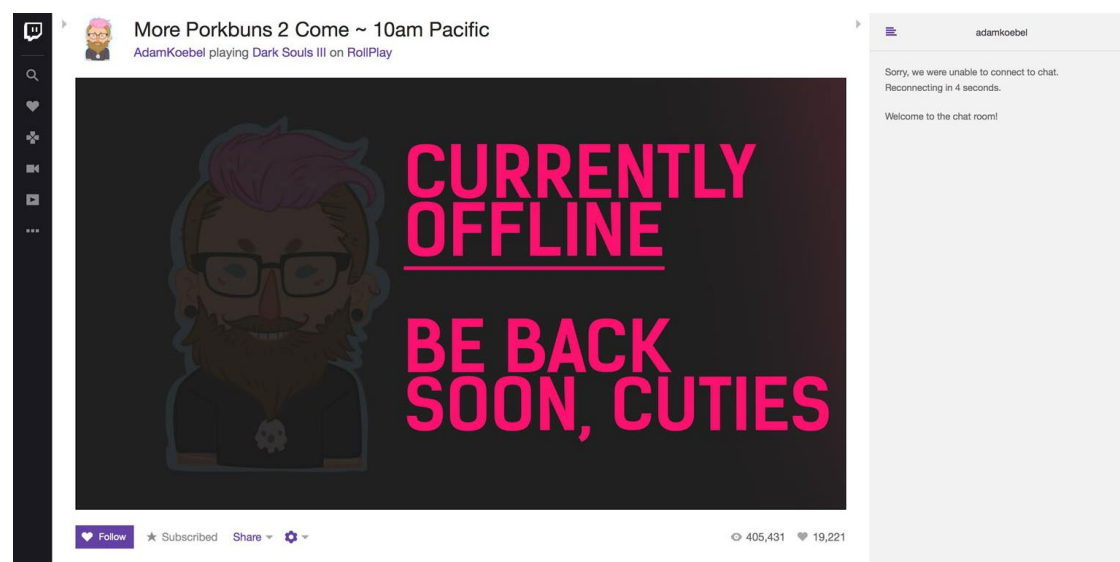


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It's also worth considering what you stream live and what you upload to YouTube, if you don't want your audience to drop off. Otikor used Roll20's software for the first time in her Missclicks game, and didn't want to slow the stream down while they learned to use it. "Here's our tech support show, followed by some D&D," she joked, "Our time slot is only two hours, which is very short, so we also jumped straight into the game for the first live broadcast. We might still put the character creation session up on YouTube."

THE GAME PLAN

Of course, to truly compete with a traditional format such as television, some scheduling is required. Set a regular slot for your game and viewers will show up each time to watch you play. That model punishes those who can't keep to a schedule, so Mercer suggests that, when life gets in the way and player availability falls short, it's best to be creative and work around it.



"It's one thing to put together a schedule for your friends, but when you're streaming you have to have a regular schedule," he warns. "Life is life, and things come up; family obligations, emergencies, work. So you have to find ways to have certain characters step into the background on occasion. You can do it in a silly way, if it's not too serious a campaign, 'Your character turns to cardboard and vanishes.' I tend to use narrative, and continuously have to find ways to rationalize why that character isn't involved in the arc, but might show up next week in the middle of it. That's a nice little challenge."

TwitchSub

While some will rise to those kind of demands, others may not relish the idea of performing in front of an audience at all. Otikor says nerves are unavoidable, and she felt them when she used fifth edition for the first time, live on Twitch.

“I did some dancing in college and they taught you to fake it till you make it, to deal with that fear,” she remembers. “When you’re live online, the audience is there and you are aware of them, but you can’t see them actually looking at you. That’s very important for me.”

Koebel, meanwhile, offers some more general advice that applies to anyone worrying about stepping into the DM’s shoes. “People are intimidated by being a DM in general, as if you have to earn your way in, and the DM is somehow a better or more talented player. But I want to see more people running games and streaming themselves, because it’s actually a lot more fun and easier than people think,” he says. “If you read the first edition AD&D *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, Gary Gygax makes it very clear that the DM is a super special person with magic powers and if you’re not good enough you shouldn’t be a DM! But a lot has changed. Now it’s everybody’s job at the table to know the rules, not just the DM.”

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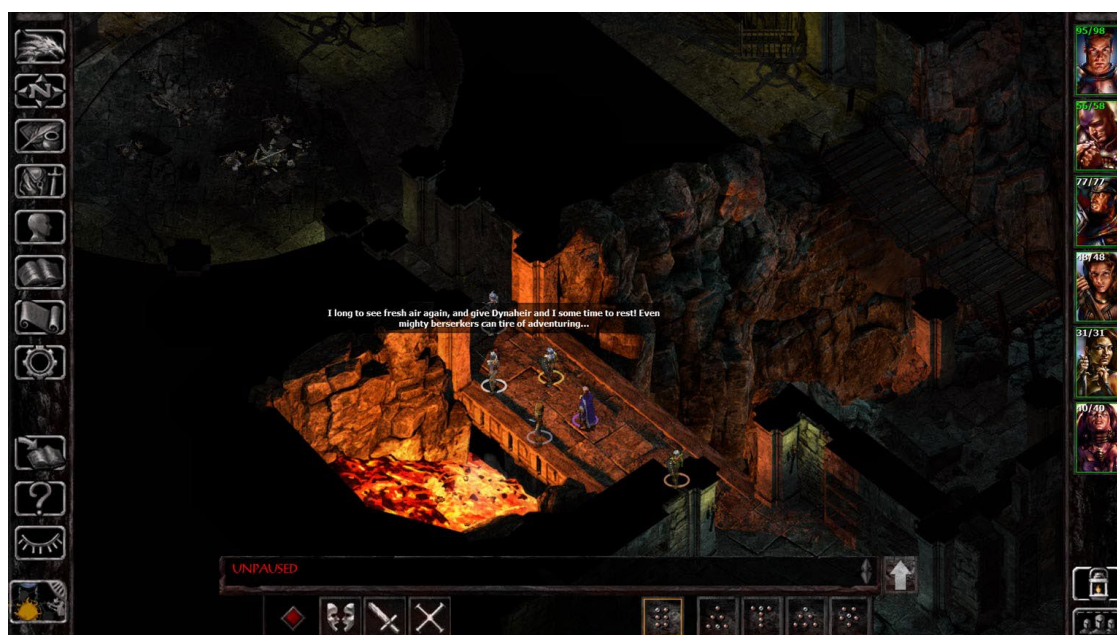
Ten Must Play Quests in Siege of Dragonspear

Alveus Malcanter, that most major of the modern minor mages, reflects on the many achievements that the hero of Baldur's Gate might accomplish in Siege of Dragonspear, the recent expansion to the Baldur's Gate video game series. Adventurers beware, though! These quests may have words that glimpse the future for your hero (i.e. SPOILERS!).

As the reigning greatest first-level mage who ever lived, I, Alveus Malcanter, have studied many, shall we say, sub-critical quests in my time. Let it not be thought that such missions are beneath even the most experienced of adventurers. Indeed, were it not for miners misplacing lucky daggers deep within mines, or little girls losing their livingly-challenged cats, most adventurers would never learn the lessons needed to achieve deeds of legend.

Recently I heard many tales of the renowned hero of Baldur's Gate, who has undertaken an all-new adventure we shall call *Siege of Dragonspear*. I learned of the exciting deeds they accomplished and

the less-exciting but still necessary tasks they deigned to perform. I always prefer to let others do the adventuring when possible and learn their lessons without risking my own tender flesh, and so I have collected the ten most interesting stories of what I've termed "sub-optimal heroic time allotment." If my teachings have failed and you have foolishly decided to follow in the hero of Baldur's Gate's footsteps, your own journey in *Baldur's Gate: Siege of Dragonspear* should at least take in the following highlights...



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10. Tome of Great Value

Upon their return to Baldur's Gate, the Grand Dukes of the city asked the hero to track down the last few supporters of the villain Sarevok who had, until recently, plagued that great city. While on this mission, the hero encountered an alchemist named Ammon in search of a rare ingredient.

This small deed, the first since the hero saved the city and prevented war with Amn, proved a good way to warm up the small adventuring muscles that can atrophy over time. More importantly, Ammon intended to use this ingredient to reveal hidden writing on a text in the library fortress of Candlekeep, where the hero's story first began. Assisting the alchemist offered an opportunity for the hero to reflect on the circumstances of their upbringing. Ammon asked a number of questions about the hero's childhood, their adventures since, and their

relationship with the villainous Sarevok. This goes to show how even seemingly innocent requests can create emotional resonance in the most jaded of heroes.



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9. The Sorcerous Sundries Caper

Sometimes a small task can lead to a much larger and dangerous quest, which is why I prefer never to do any tasks at all. This phenomenon occurred when the hero entered Sorcerous Sundries to purchase a few supplies and was asked to fetch a case of empty potion bottles for the proprietor. Ever helpful, the hero ventured upstairs only to interrupt a burglary. When one cannot even browse one's local magic shop without encountering giant spiders and drow mages, how can one ever feel safe? (The answer can be found in my upcoming book, *Constructing One's Personal Impenetrable Fortress: A Beginner's Guide*).



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8. Dwarves of Dumathoin

I've heard it said that a maxim of army life is "hasten to linger," and that is what befell the Flaming Fist contingent on their march to Dragonspear Castle. At the Coast Way crossing, the army was forced to delay when they discovered the crusade had seized control of the crossing itself.

While the Flaming Fist was delayed, the hero of Baldur's Gate explored the surrounding area and came upon a group of beleaguered dwarves fighting undead in an underground complex. The leader of the dwarves, one Brother Deepvein, asked the hero for help in locating their missing leader, Gryn Coldhearth. The hero delved shallowly into the ruins below (there was only one subterranean level) and discovered the secret of what had truly happened to Coldhearth. What did happen? Well I don't know. It's a secret.



7. Ancient Menhirs

My books of advice for the novice adventurer have taken their rightful place in Faerûn's libraries of note, but I have much wisdom not yet distilled into pamphlet form. My upcoming lecture on this summer's tour is to be titled, *Don't Talk To Rocks! (Or Other Inanimate Objects That May Be Mimics)*.

The hero of Baldur's Gate ignored this potentially life-saving maxim when they investigated musical menhirs near the Coast Way crossing. Each of the rune-covered stones hummed at a different frequency, and by singing back to them the hero was able to speak with the spirit of a long-dead adventurer, slain at the hands of a powerful wizard. Said wizard studied the highest circles of magic in ages past but was now nothing more than dust, while I am still alive, thus showing the value of focused study on first-level spells.



6. Tender of the Dead

Bridgefort stands next to the infamous Boareskyr Bridge, where apparently something of note happened but it didn't involve me, so how noteworthy could it truly be? At any rate, the crusade had surrounded Bridgefort and many of the defenders had died, so when a priestess of Lathander asked for the hero's help in bringing the bodies of the dead to the temple, it seemed a simple and pious request.

However, a missing necklace on one of the corpses (an incident I had nothing to do with, I assure you) cast suspicion on a travelling cleric last seen entering the forest east of Bridgefort. The hero went in search of this cleric and found not a common grave-robbing scheme, but evidence of gruesome activities committed by the twisted follower of an evil god.



5. Well, Well, Well

Apparently the hero also found some sort of link between a dusty chicken and an old well near Bridgefort, which shows that some sub-optimal heroic time allotments are not as dramatic as others. Of this incident I will only say that poultry-based humor is the *lowest* form of humor.



4. Foehammer's Blessing

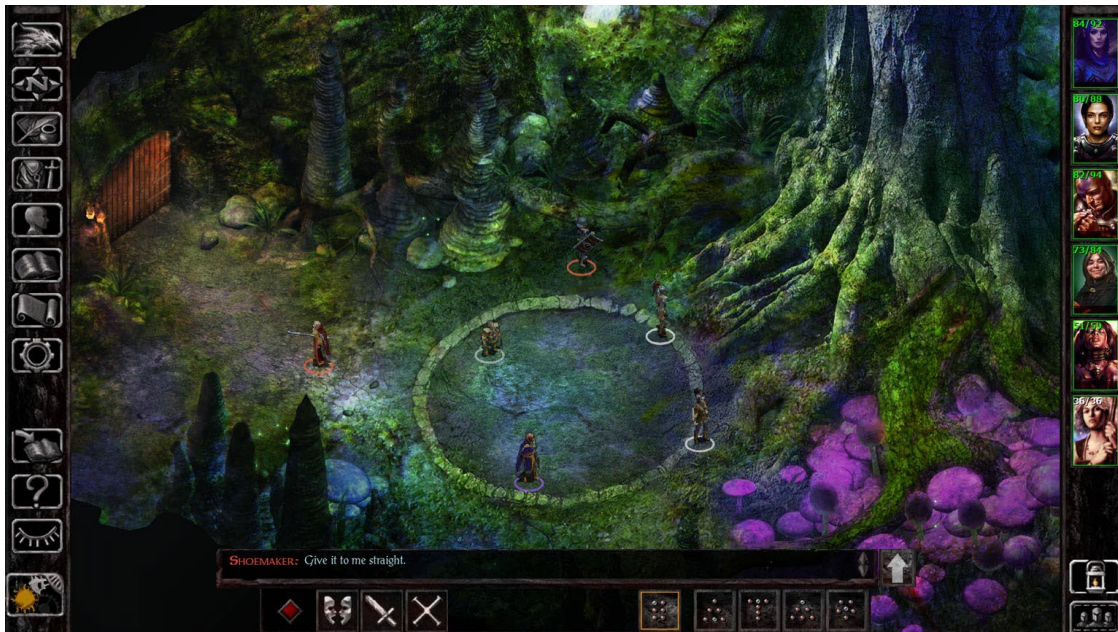
The courtyard of Dragonspear Castle is not a place I'd like to find myself, with or without a crusade present. Between the brigands, the devils, and the giant dragon skeleton looming above it all, it seems less attractive than the local tavern or, indeed, my own bed. That didn't stop the hero of Baldur's Gate from infiltrating the courtyard in the guise of a crusader, though.

Even in the heart of enemy territory, the hero found tasks to accomplish. One involved reconstructing a broken shrine of Tempus, once called the Hold of Battle Lions. The pieces of a shattered icon of Tempus were scattered about the courtyard but the hero spared no effort in uncovering and restoring them. This busywork proved beneficial when the Lord of Battles himself spoke through the icon and offered the hero a choice of being tested or walking away. I know you're thinking, that had I, Alveus Malcanter, been in that situation, I would have chosen to walk away, but you would be wrong. I would never have entered the courtyard in the first place.

3. Gurgle & Floss

A hero must be many things: a warrior, a diplomat, a shield to those adventurers following in the back, a storyteller. It was this latter trait that served the hero of Baldur's Gate well in the underground river caverns near Dragonspear Castle.

Two ferocious and unholy creatures of most devastating power, the underwater dwellers known as sahuagin, blocked access to the northern tunnels. Though the hero could have simply destroyed the fiends, they instead chose to weave a charming tale. This had the unexpected effect of working (it was unexpected to me, at least), and the sahuagin let the hero pass by without violence.



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2. Slime Sickness

A curious tale was told to me by a gnome who once served with the crusade. Apparently while exploring the underground caverns, the hero of Baldur's Gate came across several crusaders who had been infected by some aggressive slime. When blobs of seemingly inert goo can cause an excruciating, extended death, it's a wonder more don't follow my example of staying home.

The caverns also housed a reclusive druid who knew much of the native plants and slimes in the area. The hero apparently sought out this druid for a cure, but if they returned in time to save the infected

crusaders I do not know. The important thing is that we all learned something, which is to never touch anything. Ever.



1. Zaviak's Vision Quest

Some of the most memorable quests a hero undertakes are those which could have gone much differently. What if one had turned left instead of right? Pulled the lever instead of pushing the button? Sprinted from the dungeon and left one's friends to die instead of, well, dying?

A somewhat confused individual in the Elfsong Tavern gifted the hero of Baldur's Gate with an unusual magic item. These "Spectacles of Spectacle" allowed the hero to see creatures from other planes, such as the Plane of Elemental Fire (also known as the Plane of Immediate Agonizing Death for Those With No Fire Immunity). Furthermore, the hero could "pull" these extraplanar creatures onto the Prime Material Plane and interact with them.

The spectacles worked but thrice, though, forcing the hero to choose carefully when pulling creatures from their home planes. If only one could go back in time and try a different route one could experience every available option, but alas, the noose of time drags us ever forward by the throat.

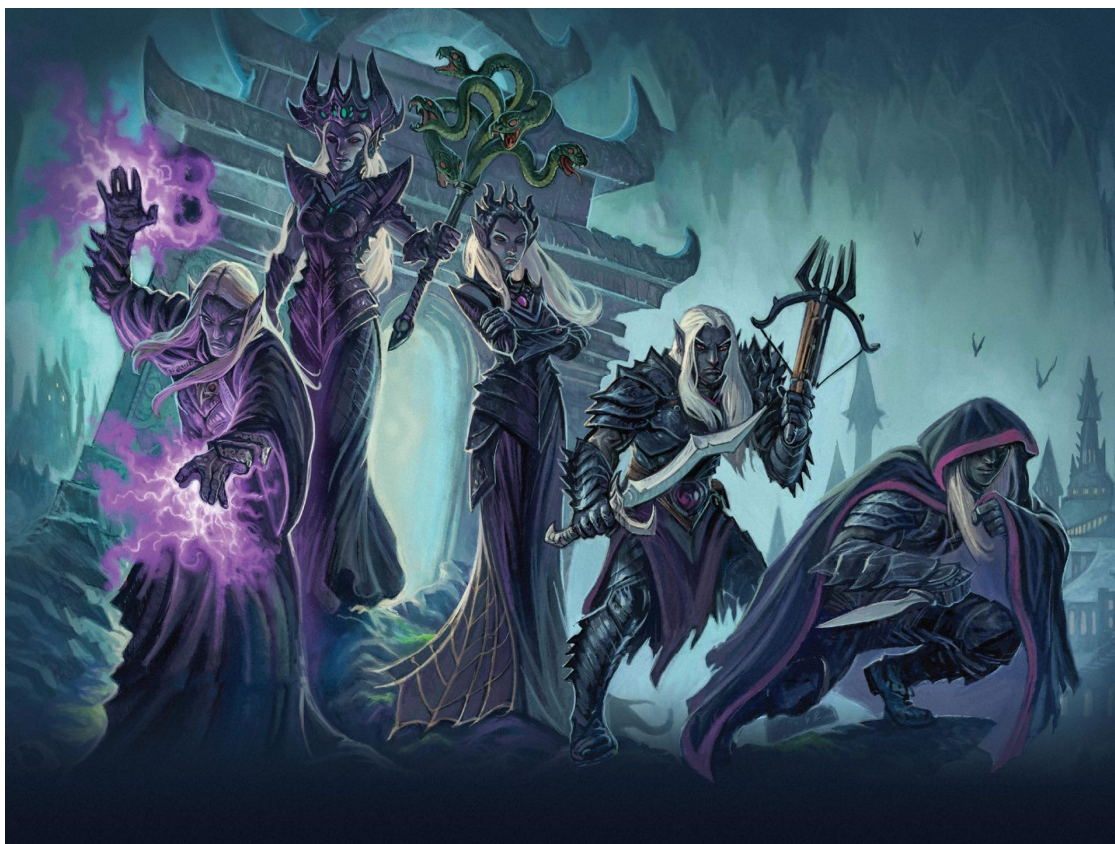
And with this final example, we see the difference between heroic individuals and more sensible mages such as myself. If someone gave *me* a pair of spectacles that served no function other than to pull dangerous extraplanar creatures into my immediate vicinity, I would throw said spectacles on the floor, crush them under the heel of my boot, and then strike said individual in the face. Likely in the nose section of said face.

Heroes, however, are cut from a different cloth and seem to enjoy strangers presenting them with dangerous magical items. Why this is, most people will never know. Unless, that is, they read my latest tome of knowledge, *The Hero's Life and How to Avoid It*. Purchase a copy to learn the lessons of the greatest first-level mage to ever live (so far) and to extend your own life.

All the best,

Alveus Malcanter

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First Look: Tyrants of the Underdark Strategies

Developers Yoni Skolnik and Andrew Veen share their pro tips to help you crush your enemies and rule the Underdark.

Trying to take control of the Underdark is like trying to map a windswept desert; just when you think you've accomplished your goal, everything shifts and there's a strong chance you'll end up buried. Yet that's your task in the latest Dungeons & Dragons board game, created in collaboration with Gale Force Nine.

Tyrants of the Underdark sees each player lead a house of drow as they try to amass victory points and win the game (for a more general breakdown of the board game, see *Dragon+* Issue 5. [Link for the app.](#) [Link for the desktop web-app.](#)). However, the game's mix of territory control and deck building offers multiple paths to victory.

Points can be earned by assassinating enemy troops, recruiting valuable minions from a central marketplace, promoting minions to your inner circle by removing them from your deck, and controlling specific sites that grant points every turn. It's up to you which "aspect" you decide to pursue, choosing from Conquest, Malice, Guile, or Ambition.

"Each aspect represents a totally different way to play," says game designer Andrew Veen. "Some aspects are good at generating influence to buy things, some aspects are very good at conquering the board, some aspects try to win quickly, some aspects try to win slowly, and they each have their own niche."

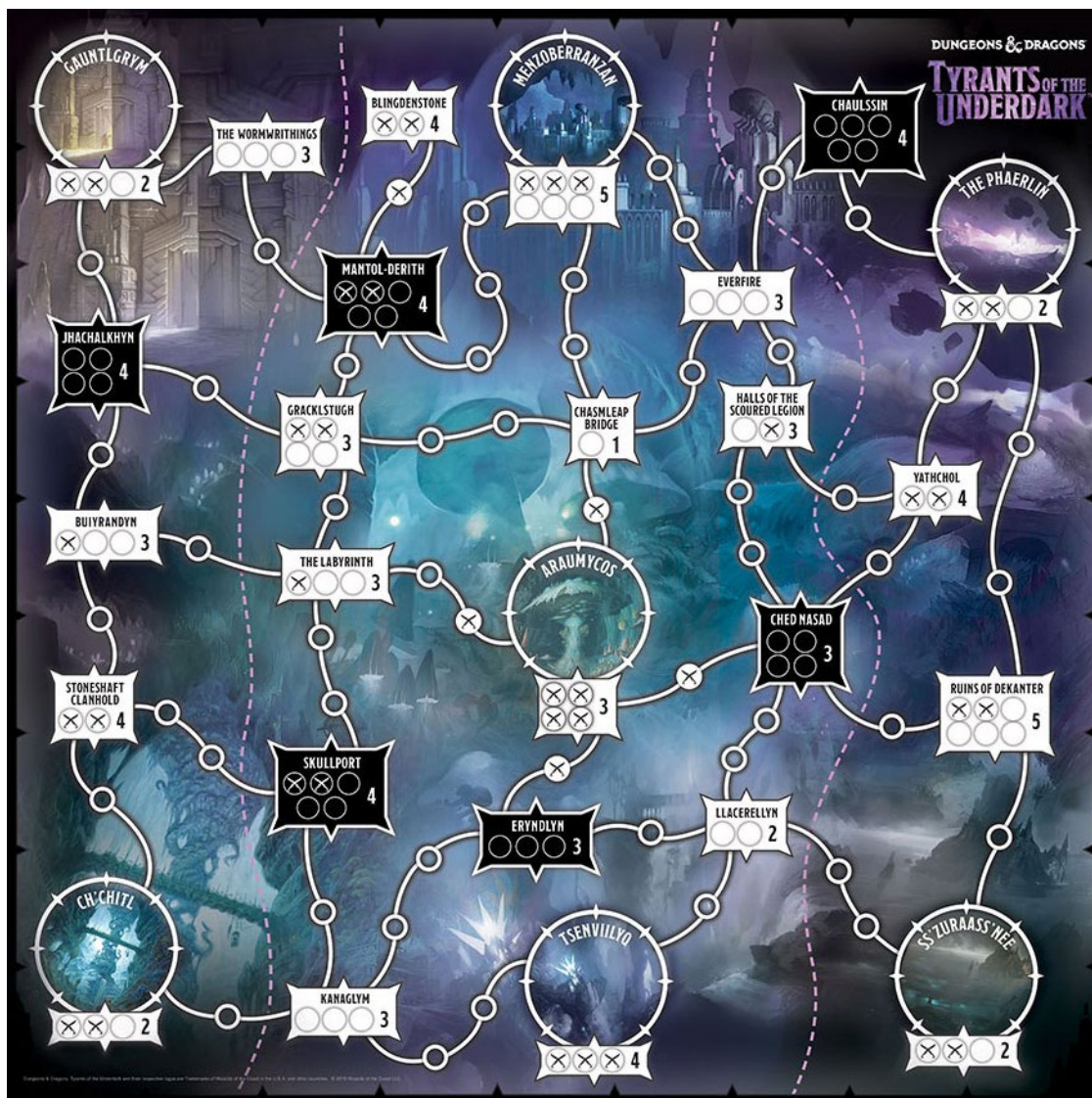
Conquest is all about putting a ton of troops on the board, getting rid of neutral minions and ending the game as quickly as possible, while that player still has the advantage.

Malice is flexible and very good at assassination, and it succeeds when players are fighting each other a lot—if multiple players are fighting over the same city, then the Malice player will usually manage to take it and come out ahead.

Guile is a sort of delayed gratification strategy. A Guile player uses spies to place minions anywhere on the board. The Guile players who look ahead and plan their next big move are the best rewarded.

Ambition tries not to interact with the board, preferring to refine its decks and score points by buying powerful cards, allowing a player to win when the game goes long.

Veen says a lot of the tactics for winning depend on whether or not people try to stifle what the other players are doing. "If the Conquest player is left to their own devices and is able to buy the good Conquest cards from the market, and no one interacts with them to try and slow them down, they will drive the game to an end," he warns, "and they will have a much greater score at that point than an Ambition player who has taken care of their deck but is not doing anything powerful yet."



(Select to view)

STARTING POSITION

“There really isn’t a way to make a wrong decision about where to start on the board,” Veen says, before Skolnik adds: “We actually felt the type of deck you intended to play was more important, rather than there be correct or incorrect places to start. You can’t start next to anyone so you can’t ever just get totally trapped.”

“How you interact with the board also often differs depending on how many people are playing,” advises Veen. “So when you’re playing a two-player game, you’ll often want to get to where your opponent is right away so that you can stop them from achieving their plans. Whereas with three or four-player games, you want to be a bit more political and be careful where you’re expanding into, to make sure you’re not threatening other players and getting them to

retaliate.”

TOP TIPS: REAL ESTATE

- “One major strategic point on the map is the center. Araumycos is an exceptionally high-value city and every strategy has a way to interact with it. It’s primarily there so the Conquest player has a goal, as they can seize it early and gain advantage from it. Late in the game the guile deck has the ability to deploy a spy there, get up to some shenanigans, get some points, and get out.”
- “There’s three spots on the board that have two spaces and are worth four points, and that’s a very good ratio. They’re both filled with neutral troops so those are places that you can expand to late in the game to grab a couple of extra points.”
- “Even though routes are not technically worth points, controlling them can be very powerful. Spending one power to place a troop on a route, even if you have no intention of expanding along that route, can sometimes be a huge stumbling block for your opponent, as they have to get through your troops somehow. Just putting up that road block is often enough to stymie what another player’s trying to do.”
- “Another very strategic location in a game with more than two players is the city with only one slot, Chasmleap Bridge. It’s a great vantage point when you’re trying to break up continuity for a player or cut off a route, as it’s a nice little bottle neck.”



(Select to view)

DIFFERENT DECKS

At the start of the game, players begin with a ten card deck, made up of seven noble cards and three soldier cards. An 80-card deck is then created by shuffling two 40-card half-decks together, and this determines what cards will be on sale in the marketplace. There are four half-decks to choose from (Drow, Dragons, Elemental, and Demons), and each promotes a different style of play.



(Select to view)

“The Drow deck is the simplest and is recommended for beginners, as it has a lot of lower influence cards that can help players ramp up the different strategies,” says Veen. “The Dragons deck has a lot of cards with a higher influence cost, so those games tend to last a bit longer, because players are rewarded for buying influence producers so they can afford the expensive cards. The Elemental deck rewards players for focusing on one aspect, which seems to appeal to those who like traditional deck-building games, because it lets them really focus on what cards they have to impact the board.



(Select to view)

“And then there’s the Demons deck, which is what we would call the ‘griever’ deck, where you have the ability to put bad cards into your opponents’ decks. But it also contains demons that can eat cards out of your own deck, which lets you counter any Insane Outcasts that an opponent places into your deck.”

While your choice of half deck can set the tone for the type of game you’ll play, the designers say they tried to keep the core game as similar as possible when designing the different decks to stop them being too disorienting.

“We tried to make it so that if you’re new to the game, you can have a very coherent strategy by just buying cards of the same aspect. So, for example, Ambition has a lot of inner circle cards that let you keep refining your deck and making it more powerful, which naturally means that as the game goes on you’ll be at an advantage to win,” Skolnik says. “To complement that, Ambition also has cards that help prolong the game by moving troops around the board to stop opponents from deploying all their troops and triggering the end of the game.”



(Select to view)

LUCK OF THE DRAW

Not that you’ll always get your way. Veen reminds us that a lot of what happens in the game depends on what is available in the market, which is random. So while you may want to operate as a Guile player, the choice of cards may force you to rethink that strategy and opt to be a Conquest player instead.

“There are three different ways you can get pushed out of holding on to one aspect,” Veen explains. “The first is that no cards come up for your chosen aspect. So you might have a lot of Guile cards and want more—to get the payoff for having a lot of spies—but nothing’s showing up. Second, another player could simply start buying the Guile cards before your turn, so you suddenly don’t have access to that strategy anymore. And the third is that the board is just going a different way, and any Guile you play is being answered by a Malice player, so you’re not getting the payoff on those cards. In that case, you may suddenly want to turn over a new leaf and do something different, because the board isn’t panning out the way you expected it to.”



(Select to view)

Skolnik says this often happens in two-player games, where both players are watching everything their opponent does in order to directly respond to their strategy. For this reason it can be a good plan to widen your focus, merging two aspects and playing them together.

“The random nature of the cards does come into play, so sometimes you’ll have no choice but to go outside the aspect you’re focusing on. But we also built in a lot of interactions where two aspects specifically work well together,” says Skolnik. “For example, Conquest and Malice are both good at deploying minions and assassinating neutrals or another player’s troops. Mixing Conquest and Guile lets you put spies in undeveloped parts of the board, so your Conquest minions can spread out from there. Malice and Guile also sit well together, as Malice is best at assassinating and Guile lets you put spies where players are weakest and where you can most

easily take over their cities.”

TOP TIPS: DECK BUILDING

- “If you diversify and try to spread your influence optimally each turn, without paying attention to the aspect you’re buying, you’ll have some powerful turns. But toward the end of the game you won’t gain as many points as you could have amassed if you’d stuck to a strategy.”
- “Different half decks reward different strategies. In the Elemental deck you want to pay a lot of attention to gaining bonuses from playing cards of the same aspect. And in the Dragons deck you want to keep an eye toward the powerful dragon cards, which reward you for certain strategies regardless of aspect.”
- “In addition to the random cards from the market, you can always buy generic minions from the ‘Obedience’ aspect. They aren’t just consolation prizes and are actually rather useful. They can bolster your turns no matter which strategy you’re playing.”



(Select to view)

END GAME

Skolnik says each aspect has some sort of “major play” to try and come out on top as the ruler of the Underdark.

Ambition: The cards that are worth points in your deck are worth a lot more points once they make it into your inner circle. However, those are also the most powerful cards in your deck, and once they enter your inner circle you don’t have access to them anymore. If it’s

the last turn of the game, it's very important to send them to the inner circle if you have the choice. But forecasting the best moment to send your powerful cards is Ambition's end game.

Conquest: This aspect is all about maximizing the final few turns to end the game as soon as possible. To win, a Conquest player must place as many troops on the board as possible, monitor vacant spaces, count the number of power they need to take over the city, and make sure they can maintain hegemony in their cities to score those bonuses.

Malice: Maximizing their own points, while also knocking other people out of cities using assassination, allows Malice players to sway the tide during their end game. Taking control of a city from another player is a major swing, but if you do that too early they can reclaim it back from you, so the timing of the strike has to be perfect.

Guile: A Guile player uses the mobility of their spies in their end game to explode into an unexpected place and disrupt other players at the same time.

Based on their own play, what course of action have our two designers found to be winning strategies? "I definitely found that paying attention to what other players are doing is very helpful. Keeping an eye on what cards your opponents have that can disrupt your strategy is key for figuring out what the right thing to do is," suggests Veen.

PRE-ORDER TYRANTS OF THE UNDERDARK



PRE-ORDER

“It’s important to know when to focus, and when to diversify,” adds Skolnik. “Don’t go in just trying to buy the best card in the market every time. React to the players around you when you need to, but otherwise focus on what you’re doing and execute it well. Last turns are also crucial. If you’re later in the turn order than another player, and you can disrupt their scoring net worth on the last turn, you can really do some damage.”

Assassinations, well-timed land grabs, and cracking the inner circle... just another day in the Underdark.

BACK TO TOP

FROM *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF THE LEGEND OF DRIZZT

R.A. SALVATORE



DRIZZT IS GOING HOME...
TO MENZOBERRANZAN,
CITY OF SPIDERS.

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DOWNLOAD
SAMPLE CHAPTER



THE LIFE OF A VAMPIRE HUNTER *is born of an understanding of what vampires truly are, for the vampire is not just a fiend that craves blood and strikes from the shadows. It is ultimately a parasite of pure, relentless evil that seeks our total subjugation. We are as chattel to the vampires, and our blood is their key to undeath.*

This understanding of the fiend's true nature creates a sacred oath shared by all vampire hunters. They come to the realization that their reality is now dedicated to rooting out this evil, and that they must release all concern for their own lives in the process. All true vampire hunters understand that they can no longer allow fear to exist within their hearts. Only their purpose can remain. Each must embrace the reality of death, in order that they can set aside the hesitation that too often turns the hunter into the hunted.

Because of this, vampire hunters often choose to live a solitary life. They are unwilling to involve family and friends in their devout quest to eradicate these evil beings—a quest that more often than not comes to a ghastly, bloodless end.

In order to save every scrap of information gleaned from their experience of detecting, tracking, fighting, and destroying these fiends, vampire hunters throughout the ages have come to an unspoken agreement to write down their exploits. Their hope is that no piece of information will ever be lost, and that future hunters might benefit from reading about their successes, failures, tricks, and

warnings.

These journals are often kept and protected by custodians of the various vampire-hunting orders. Those custodians ensure that vital information is available to those who wish to become hunters, and to those experienced hunters who utilize the journals for deeper understanding.

In the event of a vampire hunter's death, great pains are taken by the members of the hunting orders to find all journals and records left behind by their fallen comrade. Word travels fast among fellow hunters, directing them to find and return this lost lore so that it might be shared. Doing so is a matter of honor and respect for fallen friends—but more importantly, all understand that when it comes to vampire hunting, knowledge is life.

—EXCERPT FROM THE VAMPIRE HUNTERS, BY WILFRAM GOSS



ezmerelda's journal

Twentieth Day of the Sixth Moon

Upon My Death

In the event of my death, it is my wish that someone take up a sharpened stake of silver and bury it in the chest of Strahd von Zarovich, who I believe to be a grand progenitor of vampires, and possibly the first of their kind. Strahd is connected to an ancient curse that now plagues all the innocent lives of Barovia. To put an end to this fiend and his curse is why I now draw breath.

If this book is found by someone who wishes to escape this dismal place, I direct you to find the Vistana seer, Madame Eva. She may be your only way out of the mists of Ravenloft and back to the safety of your world.

If this journal has been found by one who wishes to slay this archfiend, then you may be in luck. I have tracked Rudolph van Richten here to Barovia, and he may yet be alive. Seek him first, as he will be of paramount importance in your quest. He was my mentor and friend, and is among the greatest of the vampire hunters. If van Richten still lives, he will be able to help you defeat Strahd. With him at your side, you have a fighting chance.

If you cannot find van Richten, then this book can guide you and give you the tools that will hopefully serve you well in your quest to destroy evil.

Third Day of the Seventh Moon

Vampire Spawn

A newly made vampire will often not know what has happened to it. I say “it” for a very real purpose. For although a vampire spawn outwardly appears to be human, its soul is an unholy void driven by a grotesque hunger for blood.

Vampire spawn can only mimic with cold intellect what they once were in life. Inwardly tormented, they claw desperately to

reclaim the time when they could feel their souls growing and flowering within them. So do not be lured into their pernicious masquerade of feelings and emotions—not until your vision is made sharp by your instincts and intention. When you realize that your very soul is at risk, you will find that the once-great labyrinth of false appearances and self-deception vanishes like a fish through unskilled fingers.

By the time you track down a spawn, any sense of its former life and identity will be gone. But spawn are cunning, and when one sees a novice hunter, it will act confused, sad, or frightened. By playing on your sympathies, it hopes to lure you closer to its fatal grasp. For this very reason, the first vampire that a novice faces is often the most dangerous. Only after much experience can vampire hunters rid themselves of instinctual hesitation.

Most vampire spawn lose their humanity like sand flowing inevitably through an hourglass. Some souls fall faster than others, embracing evil even before their first kills. The less fortunate creatures must fumble through several kills, trying to come to grips with their heinous nature before their souls are entirely consumed. Early in my career, and still terribly naive, I took in a vampire's victim in hopes that I could cure him through an experimental decoction of wolfsbane, moonglove, yarrow, and twitchtail. I lashed him to a thick support beam in the cellar, then watched helplessly as his humanity slipped away. The terrible hunger quickly overtook him, like wolves on a dying elk. The wretch writhed and cried out as if poisoned, then suddenly stiffened like one impaled on a pike. His flesh blanched. His eyes turned dead like stones. Then a darkness filled those eyes, helping me to truly understand the vampire's irredeemable nature.

Eleventh Day of the Seventh Moon

Dealing with the Devil Himself

Your best weapon against Strahd is not the stake or the silver blade, but your powers of objective perception—your internal awareness of what is fact and what is false.

Like any master predator, a vampire of the age and power of Strahd will attack that which is weakest in its prey. For creatures of any of the sentient races, our weakest points are our minds, which are easily clouded by manipulating our emotions and pandering to our darkest desires.

Strahd has lived for countless centuries, and he has tired of the kill. That is not what is most important to him now. He is interested solely in the corruption of souls. He envies purity, hating its innocence and freedom. No matter how sullied you believe yourself to be, your soul is a shining diamond of hope and clarity compared to his irredeemable darkness.

Strahd's power lies in finding your weaknesses, then twisting them into warped realities. If you succumb to his power, he can make you see your friends as enemies, or turn a simple desire into hateful greed or murderous envy. He will seek out all your buried hatreds and fears, then gather them up to become the strings with which he directs you as his unwitting puppet.

How can you avoid this threat? How can you tell if Strahd's charm has wormed its way into your mind?

All I can say is, "Be vigilant."

Strahd will try to get your allegiance and turn you to his side. Your anger and pain are his tools. Your pride and arrogance are his weapons. It takes only a moment for Strahd to reweave the fabric of your mind with his threads of whispers and illusions.

Should you feel yourself being taken over by his power, isolate yourself. Chain yourself in a cellar if needs be, and do not act upon the thoughts within your mind. For those thoughts will be the machinations of Strahd, and can cause only pain and interminable sorrow for you and those you love.

Twenty-Fifth Day of the Seventh Moon

Tools and Tricks

Holy water is a potent distraction for vampires and their spawn.

Because those creatures never unconsciously blink, their preternatural awareness is of a singular intensity much like a serpent's. Throwing holy water at its eyes can make a vampire recoil, giving you a moment's disruption in which to strike or flee.

A vampire might sometimes look distracted or seem as if it is lost in reverie. Know that this is a carefully rehearsed act meant to cause prey to relax, even for a moment. Underneath this act, the fiend can barely contain its lust for blood, and you can be sure that its full attention is locked in on the heat of your beating heart and the pulse of your veins.

When hunting vampires, look to fog and vegetation as an indication of their presence and power. Where the fog is thick and moving in irregular ways, you can be sure that an elder vampire is near. The thicker the fog, the older the vampire. As well, where vegetation is withered, look for the nest of a vampire spawn. These creatures will often use existing holes in the base of trees or between boulders to get deep into the ground without leaving traces of freshly dug earth. If the vegetation is blighted and twisted, this is instead the sign of an elder vampire nearby. As a rule, the more extreme the distortion of the natural order, the more powerful the vampire that causes it.

Shadows will also bend and warp in the presence of a vampire, and there again, the intensity of the effect increases with the power of the fiend. When the hair stands up on the back of your neck, you may take it as a sign that you are being stalked by the undead. With training and sensitivity, your body can become an instrument in sensing evil and unholy beings. I have found that when fighting the damned, instinct serves me better than my intellect. Research and knowledge have their place and are a vital part of hunting. But when you are faced with life and death, trust your gut and do not hesitate.



Neverwinter's Massively Multiplayer Dungeon Master

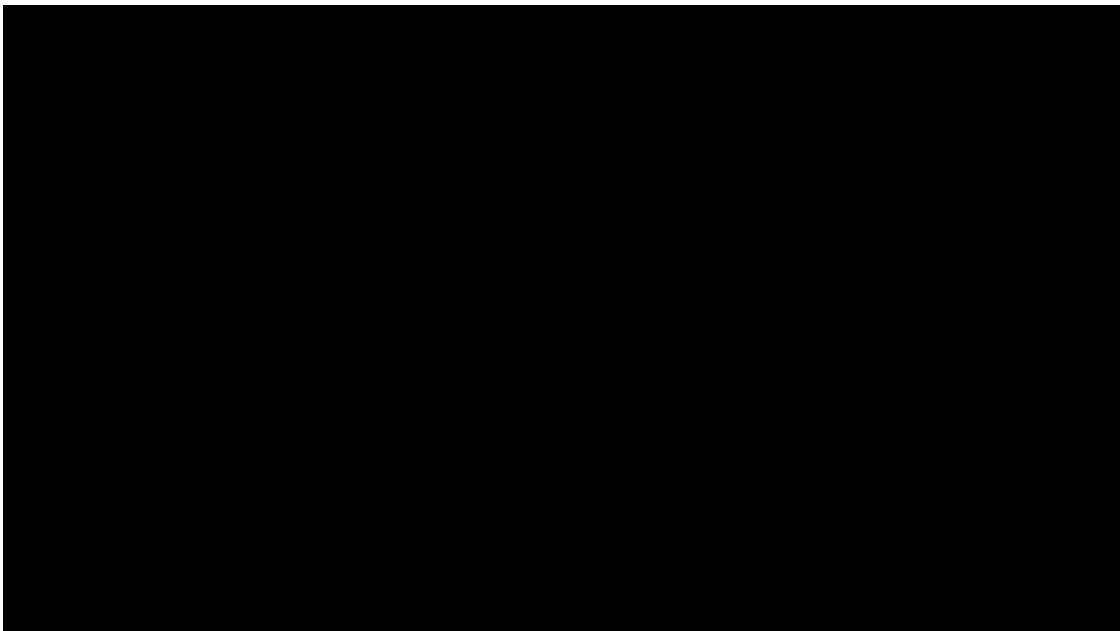
Celebrity DM Chris Perkins brings the D&D tabletop experience into the MMORPG video game.

Respen Durothil has returned to *Neverwinter*, which can mean only one thing—his *Marvelous Game* has returned with him! This yearly event transforms fully grown player characters in the free-to-play MMORPG into tiny figurines, recreating the charm of a tabletop D&D game in the video game world. And this year Respen has some help from Portobello DaVinci, who'll be familiar to fans of Acquisitions Incorporated.



“So far, this is the most meta D&D-related thing I’ve ever done,” Chris Perkins tells *Dragon+*, “...but the year is still young.” Throughout April, Perkins appears as DaVinci in a series of challenges inspired by the **2015 PAX Prime live performance**. Much like *Respen’s Marvelous Game*, which challenges a party of adventurers to accomplish a series of feats ripped from the pages of a D&D manual, this bonus series of quests takes its cue from the Acquisitions Inc. playbook.

The first Perkins knew of his potential appearance in the game was when the folks at Cryptic contacted him with a request to do some writing and voice acting. “I’m flattered that they liked the Acquisitions Incorporated D&D live game enough to base their content around it. Seeing myself rendered as a digital character was bizarre, although I think the artists nailed my soulless expression,” he jokes.



The full-fledged, in-game campaign crafted by Cryptic Studios contains a cast of new characters, including Flabbergast and his cat, Mr. Snibbly, as well as the two gargoyles that appeared in the live game. The event is also rife with Perkins's brand of humor, which fans of the PAX live shows will certainly appreciate, including some sick new burns from those wisecracking gargoyles.

“All of the gargoyle insults in *Neverwinter* are new. I wrote a bunch of them, and Cryptic added a few. Of all the gargoyle zingers that I wrote for the game, I think my favorite is, ‘You put the U in moron.’ That one got a few good laughs in the recording studio,” Perkins says.

DaVinci's series of challenges include the Trial of Traps, Artificer's Workshop, A Rock Falls, and Strange Things at the Burrow Dawn Inn, with adventurers able to participate in a new trial each week. Survival is not guaranteed in the games, but rewards most certainly are. These include a new Apocalypse Dagger artifact item and a companion, Staldorf, which were both inspired by the Acquisitions Inc. live game. Players also earn Crystal Dice and Accreditation when they pass these tests, which can be used to complete tasks in Respen's campaign.

Might DaVinci's presence become a yearly thing for *Neverwinter*? “I'll leave that decision to Cryptic,” Perkins says. “They know what their players like and don't like. If the content goes over well and Cryptic has a plan in mind for Portobello's return, I'd be happy to be involved in some creative way.”

All of which has *Dragon+* wondering, how else could the Acquisitions Inc. adventures be re-purposed? “I would love to see an animated TV show, personally, but that's just me,” suggests Perkins.



Neverwinter is a free-to-play action MMORPG that features fast-paced combat and epic dungeons. Players explore the vast city of Neverwinter and its surrounding countryside, learning the vivid history of one of the Forgotten Realms' most iconic cities and battling its many enemies. *Neverwinter* is currently available on PC and for Xbox One, available from the Xbox Games Store (Xbox Live Gold membership sold separately, but required for play).

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Get in quick, as these events only run until April 28, 2016. DaVinci can be found heralding players in Protector's Enclave, standing alongside Respen on the event dais, ready to summon them to the Burrow Dawn Inn ("The mushroom soup is to die for, but the service is slow," DaVinci reports). You can get there by interacting with the tabletop version of the Burrow Dawn Inn next to Respen, or, if you'd prefer, you may speak to Respen directly and ask for assistance. This year you'll be able to keep track of your progress with the campaign system, including separate logs for DaVinci and Respen's maps, each with their own rewards to unlock.

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Making Madam Eva

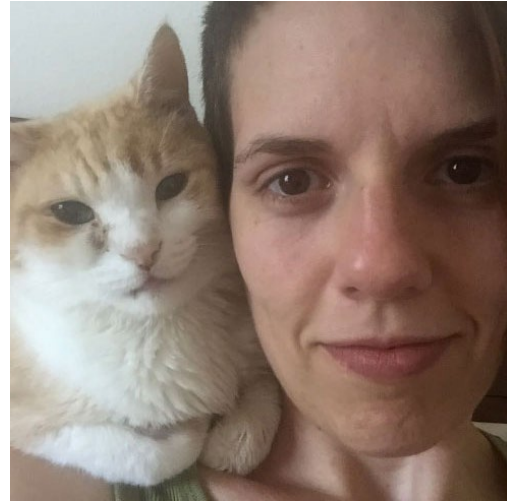
As a Dragon+ reader, we'd wager you cast an occasional glance at the official D&D Twitter account. Being the sort of inquisitive person you are, you probably looked at the tweet pinned at the top of that page and gave it a cheeky retweet to see what happens. The result? A personalized fortune from Barovia's foremost Vistani diviner, Madam Eva.

“**S**he runs on magic,” Courtney Stanton says with a laugh when we ask how this eerily prescient version of the *Curse of Strahd* character came about. Stanton and her partner Darius Kazemi make up Feel Train, a creative cooperative that designs dynamic interactions between humans and computers, and Madam Eva is their latest technological creation. “It’s funny, because at the very beginning people were saying, ‘Is this a really tired intern?’”

Feel Train was approached by the D&D team to help create something special for the return to the world of Ravenloft. With

almost 68,000 people following the official D&D Twitter account, it seemed like the perfect platform.

“They had a lot of the idea already worked out,” Stanton remembers, “and they wanted it to be an interactive Madam Eva, doing Tarokka predictions for people. But they were really concerned about the scalability and that it had the right flavor, which is hard when you’re doing generative text in less than 140 characters with an image included.”



Courtney and her cat Christopher

Although neither member of the team was a D&D regular, they also weren’t coming to the project cold. Stanton admits she has a second edition thief tucked away somewhere that never finished a campaign, and is more familiar with video game RPGs, while Kazemi played D&D as a kid, alongside a lot of other pencil and paper roleplaying games. “I was also a video game developer for about 10 years and the very first game I worked on was *Dungeons & Dragons Online*, the MMO made by Turbine. That was set in Eberron and had a steam punk thing going on, so it was very different from Ravenloft.”

IT’S A MAD WORLD

Kazemi compares the process of writing Madam Eva’s automatic text as similar to playing *Mad Libs*. He says this “templative” style of writing is very different from normal writing, as the aim is to fit parts of phrases together to create hundreds of different outcomes that still make sense. “I’m able to look at a bunch of words in a spreadsheet and say, ‘That’s a different tense than another word, so it’s going to come out awkward if we put it in there, so we should change it from present tense to past tense.’”

“The first draft was very witch-like, sort of kitchen magic, with lots of stuff about gems and herbs. The team at *Dungeons & Dragons*



Darius (© Jennifer Brommer)

said, “This is great but it doesn’t sound enough like Ravenloft. It’s not depressing enough,” recalls Stanton. “I really like gothic horror in general, so as we were working on this back in November and December I went stomping around Portland. It’s was all bleak, raining, and foggy and was the

perfect inspiration.”

Determined to capture Barovia’s dank vibe, the pair set about breaking down the interpretations of the Tarokka deck cards. As Kazemi points out, the ability to deal out fortunes is tied into the very fabric of Ravenloft’s gameplay, which was set in place by original creators Laura and Tracey Hickman to make every playthrough different.

“Ravenloft has that whole game system where you pull fortunes and determine what sort of encounters you have. If you pull this card you’re going to encounter Strahd at the farm but if you pull this card you’re going to encounter him in his castle,” he says. “We took all of those into account, so if your card is the Raven you’re probably going to get a fortune that has something to do with a vintner, referencing the winery where the wereraven lives. So we paid close attention and our fortunes really do match up with the in-game DM guides.”

Looking through the 54-card Tarokka deck, it was obvious to the pair that each card had a unique meaning. They also noticed that each of the four suits (stars, glyphs, coins and swords) also generally had a similar flavor. Building that into Madam Eva’s tweets created some very deep spreadsheets. “Our conversations went, ‘Is anger more of a stars thing or a swords thing? Oh it’s probably a swords thing,’” Stanton says.



(Select to view)

However, aside from those 40 “lesser” cards sits a “high deck”, made up of Hooded One, Tempter, Seer, Executioner, Ghost, Warrior, Priest, Traitor, Guild Member, Darklord, Donjon, Evoker, Rogue and Wizard. When the Twitter version of Madam Eva drew any of these cards, they used their own sentence structures from a unique spreadsheet, to keep her prophecies feeling fresh.

“What we definitely didn’t want was that thing where you look through Madam Eva’s feed and after five or ten tweets it’s repetitive. Based on the amount of re-engagement and as much as the bot continues to tweet and people continue to play with it, I think we accomplished that,” Stanton says. “It was also really cool to have the Tarokka deck images to work with. That just adds so much to the bot. It’s a great thing to open your phone and get this really beautiful piece of art in addition to this little dire warning.”



(Select to view)

PASSION PROJECTS

Feel Train’s mission is to imbue its digital creations with a sense of humanity. Alongside a project with *This American Life* to make podcasts more discoverable and shareable, Stanton and Kazemi are currently working on a bot that looks at Wikipedia and tries to understand relationships between different things. “It’s supposed to do research on its own, so it’ll tweet something like, ‘In the year 1922 both this invention and that invention came out. Were they related? Who knows?’” explain Kazemi. “The client is a publisher of a series of research-orientated books, so it’s as if this bot is coming up with ideas you could pitch to them.”

Neither of which is as weird as Kazemi's killer app. Every month \$50 worth of goodies turn up at his door, purchased by an automated shopper that randomly scours Amazon for him. "Everyone loves that thing but me because we have to live with the stuff it sends," says Stanton, making us wonder what the weirdest thing it's ever purchased would be?

"Most people aren't aware of this, but there are automatic publishers on Amazon. They grab books that are out of copyright and do print-on-demand services. Their whole business model is either that you're searching for a book and don't realize you can download it for free online, or you just want a print copy and you're getting it from them. The problem is it's often automated or very poorly done," Kazemi says.

"So my bot bought a book about palm reading written by a man named Cheiro, who was like a super celebrity at the turn of the century. But because it's the free text version, it doesn't have any of the illustrations. Yet the whole book refers to figure one or figure two and there's no figure to look at! It was weird, but then it was a book published by a computer and purchased by a computer."

Still, we're sure Madam Eva would be proud of that fortune telling purchase. While she may be a Twitter bot, once you've interacted with her, it's hard not to think of her as a real person. "I have a tendency to really want to anthropomorphize bots, to give them a character," says Stanton, echoing our thoughts. "You give them an intense back story and I want to go with that. OK, so she's Madam Eva."

No wonder her fortunes have been so popular. Stanton fully expected the Dungeons & Dragons community to embrace the concept, but even she's impressed by their enthusiasm for the project. "Will D&D players want to engage with the official D&D account about a new D&D campaign coming out? Of course they will. But people have really gotten into it and it was great to see them pick up something that is technically just a spread sheet and a construction of adjective, noun, verb, adjective."

"My favorite was a person whose Twitter icon was a raven and their user name was raven something," adds Kazemi. "They actually drew

the Raven card and they were so happy. But it was totally by accident.” “Or was it?” asks Stanton. “That’s the thing, it’s the human desire to create meaning out of stuff like that,” says Kazemi.

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ICONS OF THE REALMS

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DUNGEONS & DRAGONS



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Imagining the Ampersand

Dragon+ cover artist Goñi Montes on female DMs, battle-hardened ballerinas and teenage darkness.

A woman's hand brushes a still pond and the ripples from that touch create reflections. Among these you can see an elemental, a dragon, beholders, a mind flayer, and several undead. The lady making those ripples is the artist's sister, and she happens to be the Dungeon Master of his D&D home game.

“The brief was to draw the quintessential Dungeon Master and to take that from my inspiration. On the first round of sketches I drew a guy, but if I'm truly drawing from my experience of playing, I've never had a male Dungeon Master. They've always been women, and for the most part, it's been my sister Jen,” cover artist Goñi Montes tells *Dragon+*. “Both of my sisters were the ones who were like, ‘We

want to play D&D, so let's play.' I was not given a choice; I was going to play. But we've always had really similar interests so I was eager to play, because it sounded cool. And that's how it's always been."

Montes's earliest experience of Dungeons & Dragons was through video games, with *Neverwinter Nights*, and his sisters were also responsible for that obsession. "I'm not the kind of guy who can play a game for leisure," he says. "I'm the guy that's like, 'There are 84 trophies that need to be collected, I'm going to start with these ones. OK, it's an RPG, so my character's going to be designed with these things.' So when my sisters gave me the booklet that came with *Neverwinter Nights*, which was massive, I read the whole thing, and by the time I'd finished, I'd already laid out all the plans of how I was going to design my character. That eventually translated as playing D&D on the tabletop, which I've been doing for two years now. So I actually came to the tabletop version quite late."



(Select to view)

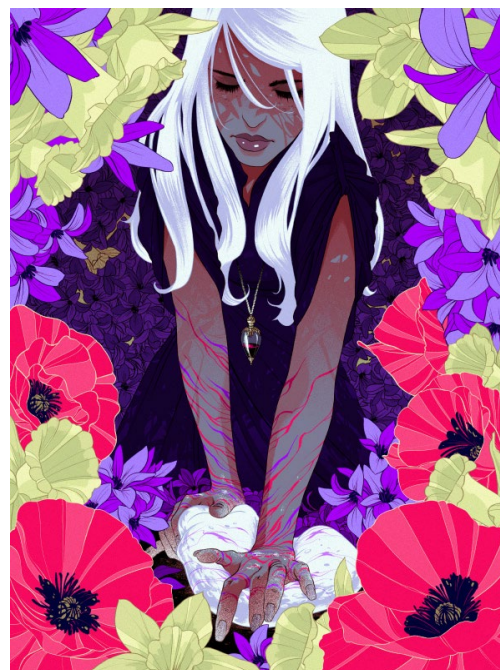
The mantle of Dungeon Master passed quite naturally to Montes's older sister, who bought all the books and equipment the players needed. However, she'd originally only wanted to play and Montes says she had got as far as creating a character.

"She actually had her character designed but it is in her nature that if nobody takes the lead, she will. So I don't know if she was reluctant to be the Dungeon Master, but it got to the point where she thought if

no-one else was going to do it, she might as well. And that's how she became the DM," he remembers. "My other sister got to play, and she always plays a massive tank that can take any hit possible. Which is hilarious, because she's a ballerina in real life."

How would you describe your style?

My art is a mashup of three very different things. The first is Caribbean colors, and I'm attracted to very, very high saturated colors because that's what I grew up with. That's combined with the fact that my home town in Puerto Rico had a very old museum that was filled with Pre-Raphaelite and art nouveau-style pieces. Because of that, I've always been attracted to soft lines and very fluid art—these liquid sort of drawings, which is something that has also made its way into my work. The last thing is that I love drawing things like fantasy and comics, so that's the third biggest influence in my work.



(Select to view)

You started out as a scientific illustrator for the Puerto Rico Sea Grant. What did that involve?

That was a very interesting job and sometimes I miss it. Although oddly the most boring part was drawing marine organisms—fish, several manatees, and a lot of microscopic stuff. The grant itself works with any kind of Litoral territory that touches water, helping with the regulation of resources and working with the communities. Every time we had to go to a fisheries community to take pictures or talk to people, I was always brought in as part of the communication department. The fun part of the job was that whenever I had to draw an organism, I had to go through all of the databases to see if we already had pictures. Oftentimes I wouldn't find any and my boss would say, "Go grab the scuba gear, we're driving to the beach." I'd be like, "Yes!" It got to a point that whenever I was doing research I was hoping there weren't already any images. If I found one: "Ah

man, I wanted to go to the beach!”



(Select to view)

Do any of those organisms ever make it into your work?

Occasionally, yes. Whenever you're creating art, you tend to incorporate things that you like. With my background in marine biology, I do love underwater stuff, so I find ways of incorporating it—whether it's a symbol or as a setting. And there are times in which the story calls for it. Tor.com has sent me several stories that are set underwater, where I get to draw reefs and fish and all kinds of organisms.

When did you first move toward fantasy art?

That was a very organic movement. At the time I was working at Sea Grant. They were attached to a very prestigious university in Puerto Rico. They were looking for teachers and told me I should get a master's degree and potentially return to teach in that university. But when I came to the United States to study, I deviated from scientific illustrations and started to develop a taste for other genres and markets—mainly fantasy, comic books, and games. Suddenly I saw the chance to switch towards that and I found it very enjoyable. It was through discussing with my teachers what I wanted to do and what made me happy that I decided I wanted to produce the kind of art that I consume and purchase. And that's how I ended up in America.

Do you mostly draw, or is some of the work also painted?

I started off drawing for the most part. During my bachelor's degree, I specialized in screen printing, which didn't allow for a lot of heavy painting, it was mainly drawing. At the time, my painting was just terrible. Throughout the years I've been racking up more experience painting with analogue media like watercolors, gouache, some oils—I'm allergic to oils, so I have to be very careful; they can't touch my skin.

I use acrylics but I hate them because they dry so fast, and the color that they give is so unnatural and so synthetic. It's funny, because oftentimes when I do use acrylics it's neon pink or neon orange or that safety yellow. I use the most unabashedly synthetic color I can find, so it is exaggerated and celebrated. But when I paint it's mostly just for myself, and right now most of my work is digital.



(Select to view)

Out of all the covers you've created, one of the most popular series has been for the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* comic. Were you a *Power Rangers* fan?

[Laughs] I hope nobody reads this. When they called me I was not. And they did ask me, "Do you like the *Power Rangers*?" And I was like, "Yes... but I don't know much about them!" The truth of the matter is that I was raised in Puerto Rico, so when I was growing up, we didn't get everything right away. Now because of the internet, everything gets there really fast. If you release an album in the US, you're going to listen to it in Puerto Rico at the same time. But back in the day that was not the way. So by the time *Power Rangers* got to Puerto Rico, I was at this silly age where I really wanted to watch it, but I also wanted to go on dates and I was afraid of people catching me watching it because that's childish. So I refrained because I thought girls wouldn't date me. But visually the *Power Rangers* are really cool.

The show had a strong character in the form of the Pink Power

Ranger, so it actually attracted quite a large female following...

That's something I only discovered now, I didn't know that back then! Now when I post the covers that I've created, all these girls that I wanted to date back then are like, "Oh my God, I love the *Power Rangers*!" The things you think as a kid. When you're around that age you're just in a dark world with your hands out trying to guess what's in front of you.

You originally came to D&D through video games. Did that have an effect on the kind of characters you like to play?

I tend to like ranged characters with healing capabilities. So for the most part, in D&D I've always played druids or rangers. A lot of my characters are glass canons—they can dish out a lot of pain and hit really hard, but they can't take a hit. That keeps you on your toes and you have to move quickly and be aware of all of your surroundings, because one hit and you're gone.



(Select to view)

Is there anything you've wanted to work on that you've not had the chance to do yet?

I've always wanted to create my own comic. And I do have stories that I've written down and I think it's time to do it. But to do that, I would have to take a sabbatical from work, because right now all my projects overlap, leaving me with no time for personal stuff. So if I go for it, it's a gamble, which is a little scary. But the longer I hold onto it, the more I think it's time to start doing it.

How did your work on the *Dragon+* cover change as the idea evolved?

We went through several different sketches and at one point we both realized we needed to take it in a different direction. Normally a sketch takes me one to two hours, but the sketch for the final cover took about four and a half hours. It was completely out of my comfort

zone, but as I was drawing it, I was probably making very embarrassing movements and gestures in my chair because I was really excited about how it was looking. It was one of those times where it was like, “I’m doing this, I’m making this, this is coming out of me, it’s awesome!” So I hope people like it.



(Select to view)

Was it easy to incorporate the Dragon Ampersand, as that’s previously been a major theme of the covers?

Originally it was very large, but as the sketches have gone by, they’ve said, “You can make it a little smaller.” So in the early roughs it was like a little surprise thing, like an Easter egg. But as the concept of the drawing changed, it’s now more obvious. She’s touching the water and it’s rippling, and underneath her hand you can see the ampersand.

What’s the reaction been from your sister?

It was really cool when I told the D&D team I usually have a female Dungeon Master and they replied, “Yes, let’s draw your sister.” That got me a ton of beer, because when I told my sister, she was jumping.



(Select to view)

To see more of Goñi Montes's work and connect with him, visit his official website.

CHECK IT OUT

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Unearthed Arcana: Gothic Heroes

Mike Mearls discusses new character options that are fitting for the world of Ravenloft.

There are a number of possibilities if you're looking for a character that is appropriate for the gothic horror present in *Curse of Strahd*, or any similar campaign. The revenant subrace provides an interesting way to bring a character back from the dead—a useful option if you've lost a character in the mists of Barovia. The Monster Hunter and the Inquisitive are two new archetypes for the fighter and rogue, respectively, well suited to the challenges of Ravenloft.

NEW SUBRACE: REVENANT

Having met a cruel and undeserved end, you have returned to the realm of the living. As a revenant, you thirst for revenge against those who wronged you in life, or seek to complete a final, critical task you

left unfinished.

The revenant subrace can be applied to any race that has a subrace, and replaces that race's existing subrace options. Alternatively, you can apply this new subrace to a race without subrace options using the modification options provided in the full Unearthed Arcana PDF (which includes the racial adjustments necessary for human, dragonborn and tiefling characters).

Your DM might also allow you to take this subrace for a slain character. In that case, your character rises from the dead with its original subrace replaced (or with the necessary modifications made to its base traits), filled with a determination to seek vengeance or complete its mission.

Revenants also gain an ability score increase to their Constitution, which increases by 1. They also gain Relentless Nature and the DM assigns them a goal—typically, one related to the character's death.

FIGHTER: MONSTER HUNTER

As an archetypal Monster Hunter, you are an expert at defeating supernatural threats. Typically mentored by an older, experienced Monster Hunter, you learn to overcome a variety of unnatural defenses and attacks, including those of undead, lycanthropes, and other creatures of horror.

Bonus proficiencies that are bestowed when you choose this archetype at 3rd level include two of the following skills of your choice: Arcana, History, Insight, Investigation, Nature, or Perception. You can gain proficiency with a tool of your choice in place of one skill choice.

As a 3rd level character you can also make use of Combat Superiority and roll additional superiority dice, while your study of the supernatural allows you a limited ability to use magic rituals thanks to Hunter's Mysticism. You also add Monster Slayer, Improved Combat Superiority and Relentless as you progress through the levels.

ROGUE: INQUISITIVE

As an archetypal Inquisitive, you excel at rooting out secrets and unravelling mysteries. You rely on your sharp eye for details, but also on your finely honed ability to read the words and deeds of other creatures to determine their true intent. You excel at defeating creatures that hide among and prey upon ordinary folk, and your mastery of lore and your sharp eye make you well equipped to expose and end hidden evils.

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you develop a keen ear for picking out lies (Ear for Deceit), the ability to spot hidden creatures or objects (Eye for Detail), and Insightful Fighting. As you proceed through the levels, you add Steady Eye, Unerring Eye, and Eye for Weakness.

GOTHIC HEROES

Download the full details of these gothic characters options.

[DOWNLOAD THE PDF](#)

You can think of the material presented in this series as similar to the first wave of the fifth edition playtest. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not fully tempered by playtests and design iterations. They are highly volatile and might be unstable; if you use them, be ready to rule on any issues that come up. They're written in pencil, not ink. For these reasons, material in this column is not legal in D&D Organized Play events.

The material presented in Unearthed Arcana will range from mechanics that we expect one day to publish in a supplement to house rules from our home campaigns that we want to share, from core system options to setting-specific material. Once it's out there, you can expect us to check in with you to see how it's working out and what we can do to improve it.

Have a request for Unearthed Arcana? Follow [@mikemearls](#) on Twitter and let him know.

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Unearthed Arcana: Gothic Heroes

This month, Unearthed Arcana takes a look at a few new character options appropriate to gothic horror. The revenant subrace provides an interesting way to bring a character back from the dead—a useful option if you’ve lost a character in the mists of Barovia. The Monster Hunter and the Inquisitive are two new archetypes for the fighter and rogue, respectively, well suited to the challenges of Ravenloft or any other gothic horror campaign.

If you have anything specific you want to see in upcoming installments of Unearthed Arcana, let me know via Twitter (@mikemearls).

New Subrace: Revenant

Having met a cruel and undeserved end, you have returned to the realm of the living. As a revenant, you thirst for revenge against those who wronged you in life, or seek to complete a final, critical task you left unfinished.

The revenant subrace can be applied to any race that has a subrace, and replaces that race’s existing subrace options. Alternatively, you can apply this new subrace to a race without subrace options using the modification options provided below.

Your DM might also allow you to take this subrace for a slain character. In that case, your character rises from the dead with its original subrace replaced (or with the necessary modifications made to its base traits), filled with a determination to seek vengeance or complete its mission.

Racial Adjustments

For races that don’t have subrace options, taking on the revenant subrace means making changes to your character’s base traits, as follows. (This playtest article provides options only for human and dragonborn characters. Because half-elves and half-orcs have no subrace options, they shouldn’t be used with these revenant subrace rules.)

Human Revenant. If you want to play a human revenant, modify the human’s Ability Score Increase trait to the following: Two different ability scores of your choice increase by 1. If you

use the variant human traits, remove the Skills trait and the Feat trait.

Dragonborn Revenant. If you want to play a dragonborn revenant, modify the dragonborn’s Ability Score Increase trait to the following: Your Strength score increases by 1, and your Charisma score increases by 1. Additionally, your Draconic Ancestry trait uses necrotic damage as its damage type, replacing the damage type that applies to your breath weapon and your damage resistance.

Tiefling Revenant. A [prior installment of Unearthed Arcana](#) outlined two tiefling variants that make use of subraces. Use that article to make a tiefling revenant, replacing the subrace options with the revenant subrace options.

Ability Score Increase

Your Constitution score increases by 1.

Relentless Nature

Your DM assigns a goal to you—typically, one related to your character’s death. The goal must be a specific task you can complete, such as slaying an enemy or liberating an area and its people. Until you fulfill that goal, you gain the following benefits:

- If you are below half your hit point maximum at the start of your turn, you regain 1 hit point.
- If you die, you return to life 24 hours after death. If your body is destroyed, you reform within 1 mile of the place of your death at a spot determined by the DM. If your equipment was also destroyed, you do not regain it.
- You know the distance and direction between you and any creature involved in your goal, such as a person you seek vengeance against or someone you pledged to defend. This awareness fails if the creature is on another plane of existence.

When your goal is complete, you finally find rest. You die and cannot be restored to life.

Fighter: Monster Hunter

As an archetypal Monster Hunter, you are an expert at defeating supernatural threats. Typically mentored by an older, experienced Monster Hunter, you learn to overcome a variety of unnatural defenses and attacks, including those of undead, lycanthropes, and other creatures of horror.

Bonus Proficiencies

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you gain proficiency in two of the following skills of your choice: Arcana, History, Insight, Investigation, Nature, or Perception. You can gain proficiency with a tool of your choice in place of one skill choice.

Combat Superiority

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you gain a set of abilities that are fueled by special dice called superiority dice.

Superiority Dice. You have four superiority dice, which are d8s. A superiority die is expended when you use it. You regain all of your expended superiority dice when you finish a short or long rest.

You gain another superiority die at 7th level and one more at 15th level.

Using Superiority Dice. You can expend superiority dice to gain a number of different benefits:

- When you make a weapon attack against a creature, you can expend one superiority die to add it to the attack roll. You can use this ability before or after making the attack roll, but before any of the effects of the attack are applied.
- When you damage a creature with a weapon attack, you can expend one superiority die to add it to the damage roll. You can use this ability after rolling damage. If the attack causes the target to make a Constitution saving throw to maintain concentration, it has disadvantage on that save.
- When you make an Intelligence, a Wisdom, or a Charisma saving throw, you can expend one superiority die to add it to the roll. You can use

this feature only before you learn if the save succeeded or failed.

- When you make a Wisdom (Perception) check to detect a hidden creature or object, or a Wisdom (Insight) check to determine if someone is lying to you, you can expend one superiority die to add it to the roll. You can use this feature after seeing the total but before learning if you succeeded or failed.

Hunter's Mysticism

At 3rd level, your study of the supernatural gives you a limited ability to use magic. You can cast *detect magic* as a ritual. You can cast *protection from evil and good*, but you cannot cast it again with this feature until you finish a long rest. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

In addition, you gain the ability to speak one of the following languages of your choice: Abyssal, Celestial, or Infernal.

Monster Slayer

At 7th level, whenever you expend superiority dice to add to a damage roll, you can expend up to two dice instead of just one, adding both to the roll. Both dice are expended as normal. If the target of your attack is an aberration, a fey, a fiend, or an undead, you deal maximum damage with both dice, instead of rolling them.

Improved Combat Superiority

At 10th level, your superiority dice turn into d10s. At 18th level, they turn into d12s.

Relentless

Starting at 15th level, when you roll initiative and have no superiority dice remaining, you regain one superiority die.

Rogue: Inquisitive

As an archetypal Inquisitive, you excel at rooting out secrets and unraveling mysteries. You rely on your sharp eye for details, but also on your finely honed ability to read the words and deeds of other creatures to determine their true intent. You excel at defeating creatures that hide among and prey upon ordinary folk, and your mastery of lore and

your sharp eye make you well equipped to expose and end hidden evils.

Ear for Deceit

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you develop a keen ear for picking out lies. Whenever you make a Wisdom (Insight) check to sense if a creature is lying, you use the total of your check or 8 + your Wisdom modifier, whichever is higher. If you are proficient in Insight, you add your proficiency bonus to the fixed result. If you chose Insight as a skill augmented by your Expertise feature, add double your proficiency bonus.

Eye for Detail

Starting at 3rd level, you can use the bonus action granted by your Cunning Action feature to make a Wisdom (Perception) check to spot a hidden creature or object, to make an Intelligence (Investigation) check to uncover and decipher clues, or to use Insightful Fighting (see below).

Insightful Fighting

At 3rd level, you gain the ability to decipher an opponent's tactics and develop a counter to them. As an action (or as a bonus action using Eye for Detail), you make a Wisdom (Insight) check against a creature you can see that isn't incapacitated, opposed by the target's Charisma (Deception) check. If you succeed, you can use Sneak Attack against that creature even if you do not have advantage against it or if no enemy of the target is within 5 feet of it. You can use Sneak Attack in this way even if you have disadvantage against the target.

This benefit lasts for 1 minute or until you successfully use Insightful Fighting against a different target.

Steady Eye

At 9th level, you gain advantage on any Wisdom (Perception) check made on your turn to find a hidden creature or object if you do not move during that turn. If you use this ability before moving, you cannot move or ready movement during your turn.

Unerring Eye

At 13th level, you gain the ability to detect magical deception. As an action, you sense the presence within 30 feet of you of illusions, shapechanger creatures not in their true form, and other magic designed to deceive the senses. Though you determine that an effect is attempting to trick you, you gain no special insight into what is hidden or its true nature.

Eye for Weakness

At 17th level, you learn to exploit a creature's weaknesses by carefully studying its tactics and movement. While your Insightful Fighting feature applies to a creature, your Sneak Attack damage against that creature increases by 2d6.



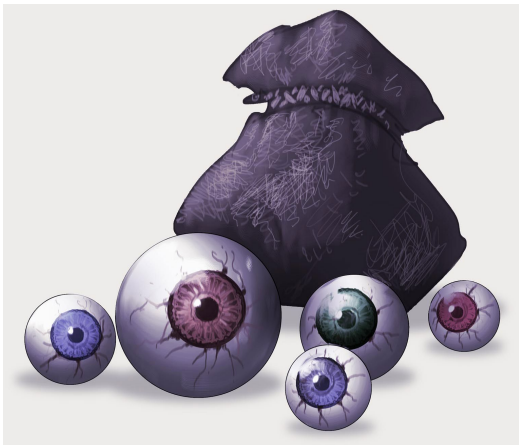
Community: Is No Fun, Is No Blinsky!

Gadof Blinsky is Vallaki's toymaker and the town's self-proclaimed "wizard of tiny wonders." He has been consumed by despair because no one seems to like him or want his toys. His fascination for eerie playthings causes most Barovians to avoid him.

Dungeons & Dragons invited members of the community to suggest creepy toys that would be at home in Blinsky's collection. We picked a few of our favorites— alongside a couple we love that appear in *Curse of Strahd*—and had D&D's concept art director, Richard Whitters, illustrate them.

For more of Blinsky's toys, (something no child could love!), check out *Curse of Strahd*.

Macabre Machinations



Lazy Eye Marble Set

A bag of glass-eye marbles fashioned in various shades of green, blue, brown, and hazel. When you roll a marble on the ground, it always appears to be looking at you.

—KEVIN S.



Ravensong Music Box

A clockwork raven sits atop a porcelain skull. Winding the mechanism plays an eerie tune, while the raven pecks the empty eye socket of the skull to the rhythm of the music.

—CHRIS D.



The Ghost Whistle

A bone slide-whistle carved in the shape of an emaciated skeletal figure, mouth agape at the end, which emits eerie ghostly sounds that can be varied in pitch with the slide.

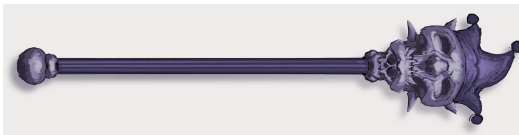
—RONALD C.



Morbid Molly

This malformed doll has a strange leer and wears a sackcloth dress. It belonged to Mad Mary in her youth and was passed down to her daughter Gertruda.

— CURSE OF STRAHD



Death Rattle

Sitting at the top of an enameled wooden rod is a skull, the remains of a gnome jester who visited Castle Ravenloft to try to entertain Strahd. The skull rattles with the finger bones of the gnome and cackles gleefully at the worst possible moment.

— CURSE OF STRAHD



OTHER FAVOURITES

Hag Doll

A leather hag doll; reaching down her throat reveals three child-like cloth dolls.

—*MATT D.*

Hunter Govan

Plush doll of a male human wearing medieval hunting clothing, crossbow, and sword. There is a slit on the doll's back allowing you to turn it inside out, turning him into a black dire wolf. Both have only one eye.

—*NHAN V.*

Death's Door Domino Set

A wooden hand-cranked coffin-shaped box that, when opened, reveals a set of domino tiles made of grey bones.

—*TIMOTEO D.*

My Pal Ivy

A small clay bust of a bald woman with instructions to dampen the head daily. After 1d4 days the head begins to sprout long fine vines of poison ivy.

—*GARRETT F.*

Fritzel's Doll House

A dollhouse in which the beautiful family rooms conceal secret rooms, tunnels and cellars. Each hidden room contains a scene of torture or murder.

—*ALEXIA S.*

Creepy Teddy Bear

A stitched up bear composed of multiple parts from different teddy bears. It is slightly animatronic and sings a creepy song of being best friends with the owner. It somehow knows the owners name...

—*BURT B.*

The Rack

A miniature torture device play set. Comes with stretchy-arm clown doll with menacing spiked-tooth grin. When the doll is placed on the rack, little wooden gears turn, stretching out the doll and causing it to laugh manically.

—*EUGENE N.*

Executioner's Coin Bank

This clockwork item consists of a hooded, axe-wielding executioner with red eyes, and a crying man at the chopping block. When a copper coin is dropped into the coin slot in the front, the headsman swings his axe downward, and the head of the crying man drops off.

The head is attached with a string, and when the axe raises again, the head is reeled back to its shoulders.

—*RYAN C.*

Laughing Top

A wooden spinning top that looks crudely carved. Yet when it is spun, it catches the carvings in such a manner as to make the sound of children laughing or crying in the distance, depending on which direction the top is spun.

—*ROBERT S.*

The Flayed Rocking Horse

Carved to look like a horse whose skin has been removed. Muscles, tendons, and blood vessels are all intricately shown. In some areas, even those layers have been removed in favor of exposing parts of the horse's skeleton.

—*SHARANG B.*

The Hearse

A little wagon with a coffin, drawn by skeletal horses. As the wheels turn a scratching sound can be heard from inside the coffin.

—*DEAN S.*

The Nightmare Story Lantern

A simple lantern with a hood covering. The hood spins as the base plays a music box tune to reveal pictures of clawed monsters, winged demons, witches, and wolves on the wall! Different hoods can be purchased to tell different stories.

—*DON B.*

Burgomaster's Hand

A clockwork dismembered hand, wearing a white glove with an ornate signet ring and dress shirt cuff with gemmed cuff links. It moves around on its fingers when wound up.

—*MICHAEL C.*

Vistani Fortuneteller

A clockwork bust of an old Vistani woman that comes to life when you put a silver coin in the slot and tells a creepy fortune. If you attempt to steal her coins by picking the lock to the coin drawer, her eyes light up red and she utters a curse.

—*MICHAEL C.*

Li'l Undertaker's Understudy

A satchel containing a cloth measuring tape, a child-sized hammer, saw, shovel and a small box of nails.

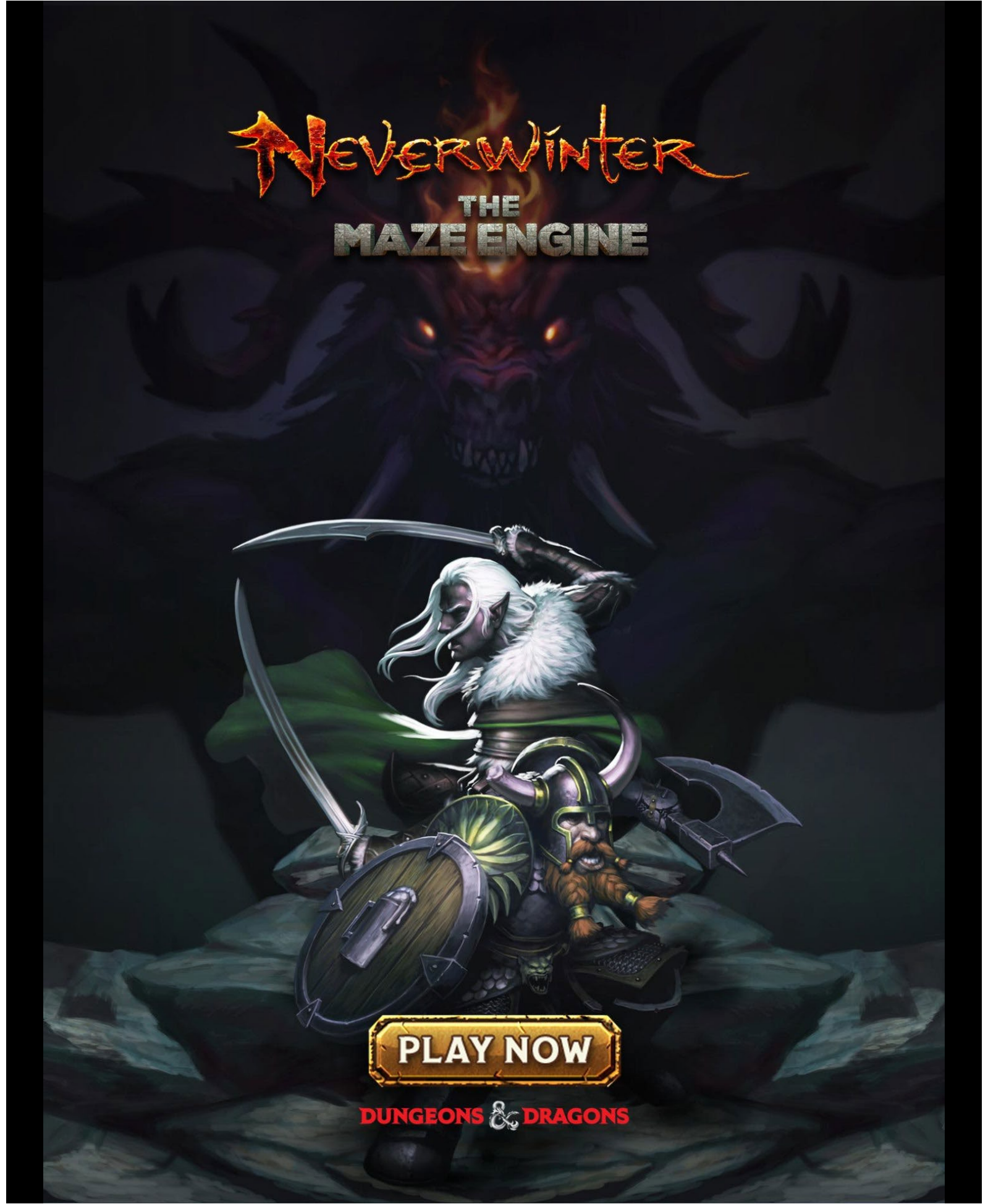
—*TIMOTHY T.*

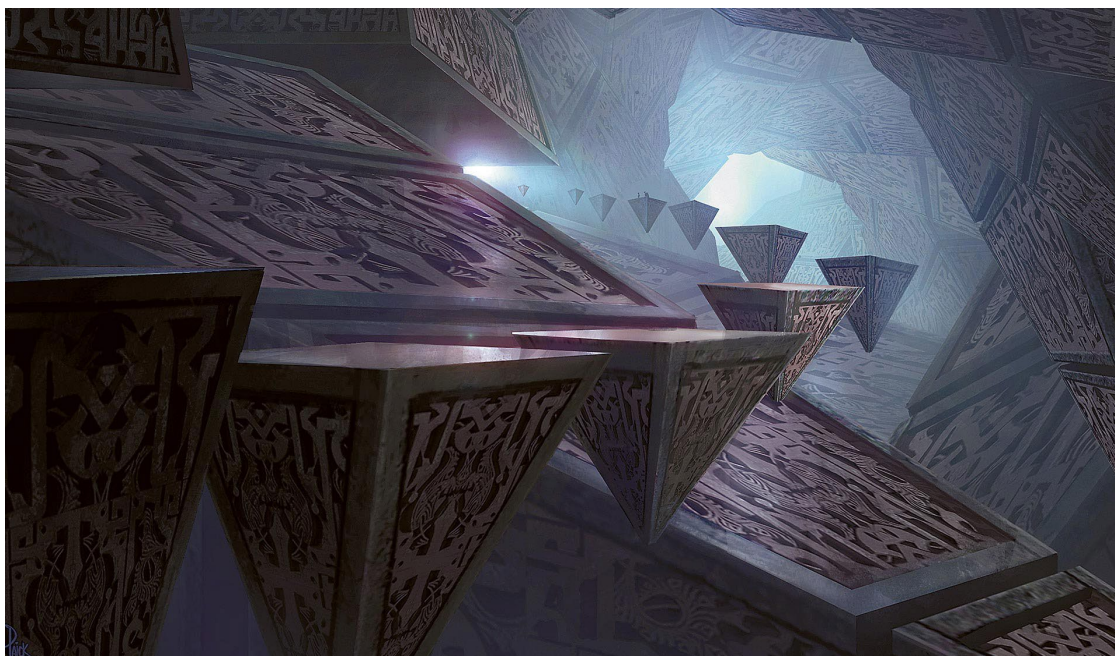
Tot in A Pot

A depiction of a hag stirring a cauldron with two withered cloth arms. As you crank the stirrer, a haunting tune plays. As the tune crescendos, a scream is heard and a child's head pops out of the cauldron. To reset the toy, push the child's head back into the cauldron.

—*ERIC G.*

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Plane Shift: Zendikar

Set your Dungeons & Dragons campaign in the world of Zendikar with this all-new resource.

Dungeons & Dragons and *Magic: The Gathering* are two different games, but that doesn't mean they exist in separate multiverses.

From the beginning, *Magic's* plane of Zendikar was conceived as an “adventure world” where parties of explorers delve into ancient ruins in search of wonders and treasures, fighting the monsters they encounter on the way. Many of the plane's creative roots lie in D&D, so it should be no surprise that *The Art of Magic the Gathering: Zendikar*, **a hardcover art book describing Zendikar** in great detail, feels a lot like a D&D campaign setting book. It's littered with adventure hooks and story seeds, and lacks only the specific rules references you'd need to adapt Zendikar's races, monsters, and adventures to a tabletop D&D campaign. And it's all surrounded by amazing fantasy art that holds boundless inspiration in itself.



Gideon

You can think of *Plane Shift: Zendikar* as a sort of supplement to *The Art of Magic the Gathering: Zendikar*, designed to help you take the world detail and ideas contained in that book and turn them into an exciting D&D campaign. The easiest way to approach an adventure set on Zendikar is to use the rules that D&D provides mostly as they are already written: A druid on Zendikar might call on green mana and cast spells like *giant growth*, but she's still just a druid in the D&D rules (perhaps casting *giant insect*).

Dungeons & Dragons uses a flexible rules system designed to model any kind of fantasy world. The D&D magic system doesn't involve five colors of mana or a ramping-up to your most powerful spells, but the goal isn't to mirror the experience of playing *Magic: The Gathering* in your roleplaying game. The point is to experience the *worlds of Magic* in a new way, through the lens of the D&D rules. All you really need is races for the characters, monsters for them to fight, and some ideas to build a campaign. The D&D rules can handle the rest.



Akoum

Plane Shift: Zendikar was made using the fifth edition of the D&D rules that you can find [here](#). *The Art of Magic the Gathering: Zendikar* will help you create a D&D campaign in that plane, but you don't actually need the book to make use of this material—you can also refer to the abundance of information about [Zendikar](#) found elsewhere on the *Magic: The Gathering* website.

The game mechanics in this supplement are usable in your D&D campaign but are not fully tempered by playtests and design iterations. For these reasons, material in this supplement is not legal in D&D Organized Play events.

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A "Nightmare" to Sculpt

The Gale Force Nine team gets its teeth into the Count and his Nightmare steed.

Under raging storm clouds, a figure on a horse stands silhouetted against the ancient walls of Castle Ravenloft. The vampire Count Strahd von Zarovich stares down at his prey, as a cold, bitter wind billows his cape. As the flames of his Nightmare steed burn brightly in the darkness, his sword swings mercilessly through the air.

“When the story bible for *Curse of Strahd*, which was codenamed ‘Cloak’ at the time, landed in my inbox, this awesome image was attached,” says Matt Parkes. “As we have never made a horse for the D&D range—or one on fire!—this had to be made into a model.”

“This image was fundamental in deciding how the Nightmare steed Beaucephalus was going to look.

Having it leaping or rearing up certainly ticked the animated miniature box.”

Parkes explains that it’s standard practice to find similar real world references to help the sculptor to get his head around a project, wherever possible. Alongside images of horses in action, he describes finding a rearing horse by Michaël Bigaud, one of his favorite miniature sculptors, as a bonus.



“It was important to choose the right sculptor for the job. I needed someone who understood Dungeons & Dragons and our studio, which lead me to Matt Bickley. His understanding of motion within a sculpture is second to none,” Parkes says.

“These are the wire armature and basic forms he built using Fimo clay and Super Sculpey. This is a very important stage, as it gives us a good idea of the direction of the miniature, and any changes can easily be made at this point, as the clay has not been baked yet.”



“The muscle groups are then added, giving more bulk, before a thin skim of clay is sculpted over the top of the muscles to smooth them

out and add the final mass to the horse. This is then baked hard, ready for a test fitting of the rider armature.”



“The lack of saddle and tackle give us a little more freedom to position Strahd. We wanted him to be looking down at ground level, possibly talking to an unwary adventurer, with Beucephalus rearing up.”

“The bulk and details for Strahd are starting to get built up and he looks more like a vampire now, with his teeth bared and his snarling animal-like expression.”





“The rough clay forms for the flames are then baked hard, adjusted and refined. These flames are sculpted in the opposite direction to the Nightmare’s movement to add even more motion to the whole piece. Also note the von Zarovich coat of arms on Strahd’s shield.”



“The flames and all the small details on both models have been finished ready for internal GF9 approval. Even at this late stage we are always very critical, and if an idea doesn’t work, we look at what would turn a good model into an awesome one,” Parkes reveals. “For example, changing Strahd’s pointing hand to hold a sword dramatically changes the model, not the pose. The narrative now is a lot stronger, and it looks like Strahd is taunting his target. At the same time there are more refinements to the hair and fur textures.”







“Our second round of internal approvals brought up an interesting idea. What if we changed Strahd’s grip on his sword, so instead of pointing it he is now swinging it, with the handle close to his wrist? We use a lot of real photographs to see, feel, and test a pose, so it’s handy that I have my Golden Demon Slayer Swords in the office! This small change has once again helped strengthen the narrative.”

“The sculpture is now ready for D&D approval. The feedback is that his head doesn’t show off his famous widows peak as much as it could and that his shield needs a strap to hold it on. So we make those changes.”



“The last stage of this miniature is the base,” says Parkes. “The key is to allow as much room as possible for Beaucephalus to stand with stable pegs in its feet for the glue, while still giving the customer a few options of foliage and groundwork details, if they wanted to add them.”

PROTÉGÉ AND MENTOR

As well as creating the dark lord at the center of *Curse of Strahd*, Gale Force Nine also sculpted two of his enemies. Ezmerelda D’Avenir is a Vistani and the protégé of Rudolph van Richten, who taught her the ways of a vampire hunter. While the two originally worked together hunting monsters, they are very different characters and now work alone.



“My first thoughts were to have Van Richten appear very scholarly, with lots of equipment and books, but we quickly dismissed the idea as we thought he would appear too overloaded and a little amateurish,” explains Parkes. “So we stripped him back to basics and pictured him walking down a corridor, possibly in Castle Ravenloft, with a lantern and sword-stick. It became apparent that we needed more information, so the D&D team drew up a more detailed version of his costume.

“Glasses are always put in place very early on. This is the main focus point to any miniature and the first thing a viewer is drawn to, as the eyes tell the story. The final stages saw more detailing, making his face stern to really show character.”

Ezmerelda, meanwhile, was a different proposition. “She has an artificial leg and is a dangerous, agile fighter. What a challenge!” notes Parkes. “It is hard not to think about pirate tropes when working with what is effectively a peg leg, but that was something I wanted to avoid. She is proud of her disability, and I see this as another trophy scar in her growing collection.

“The pose that was finally selected saw her duel-wielding her long sword and axe. Applying her coat gave her a sense of movement. Finally, feedback on her face suggested it could be thinned down around the jaw-line and her nose could be made less prominent. She’ll look even more amazing when painted.”

Order your D&D: Curse of Strahd—Strahd von Zarovich figure now!



ORDER

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Sage Advice

Jeremy Crawford chairs the monthly column that gives official clarifications of D&D rules and provides reference documents to help your D&D game run smoothly. What's the first rule of Sage Advice? The Dungeon Master—not this column or the rulebooks—is the game's adjudicator.

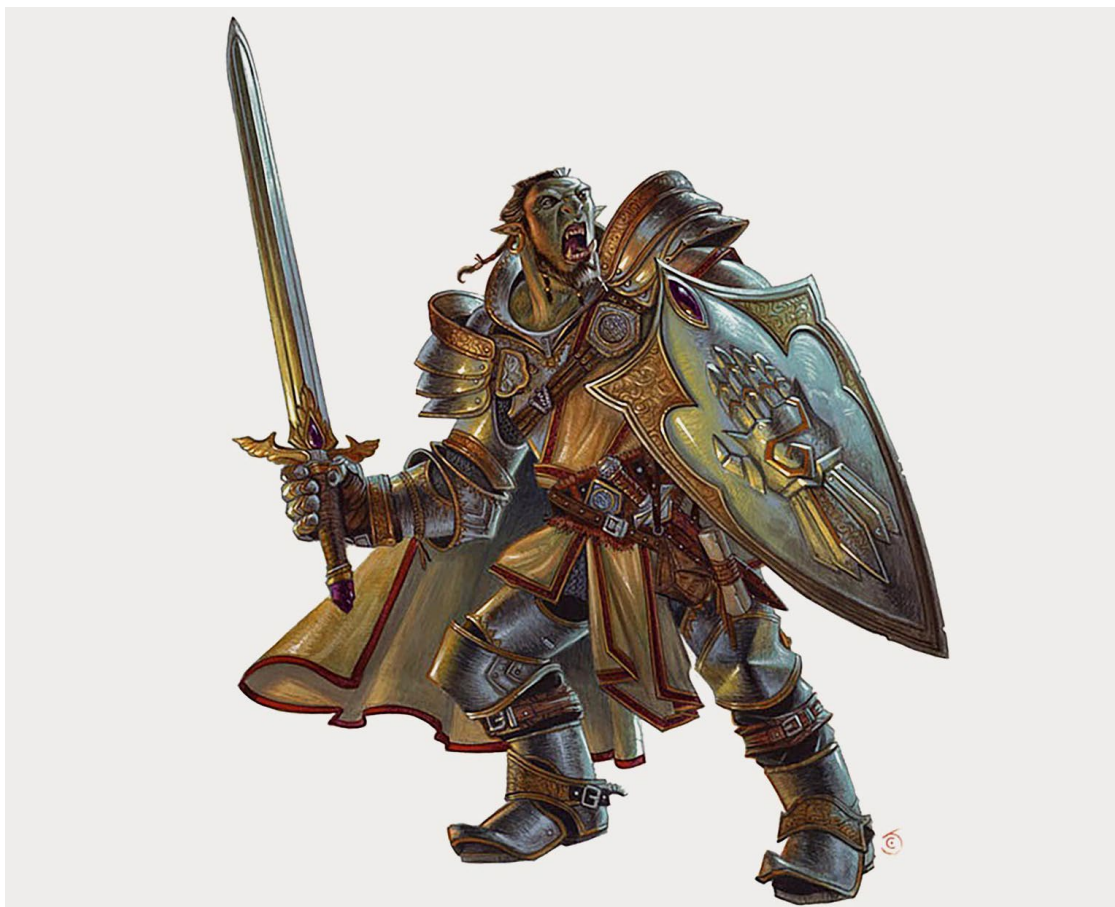
CLASS FEATURES

If you use Great Weapon Fighting with a feature like Divine Smite or a spell like hex, do you get to reroll any 1 or 2 you roll for the extra damage?

The Great Weapon Fighting feature—which is shared by fighters and paladins—is meant to benefit only the damage roll of the weapon used with the feature. For example, if you use a greatsword with the feature, you can reroll any 1 or 2 you roll on the weapon's 2d6. If

you're a paladin and use Divine Smite with the greatsword, Great Weapon Fighting doesn't let you reroll a 1 or 2 that you roll for the damage of Divine Smite.

The main purpose of this limitation is to prevent the tedium of excessive rerolls. Many of the limits in the game are aimed at inhibiting slowdowns. Having no limit would also leave the door open for Great Weapon Fighting to grant more of a damage boost than we intended, although the potential for that is minimal compared to the likelihood that numerous rerolls would bog the game down.



If a warlock uses Pact of the Blade to bond with a magic weapon, does that weapon have to be a melee weapon, and can the warlock change the weapon's form?

The warlock's Pact of the Blade feature (PH, 107–8) lets you create a melee weapon out of nothing. Whenever you do so, you determine the weapon's form, choosing from the melee weapon options in the Weapons table in the Player's Handbook (p. 149). For example, you can create a greataxe, and then use the feature again to create a javelin, which causes the greataxe to disappear.

You can also use Pact of the Blade to bond with a magic weapon, turning it into your pact weapon. This magic weapon doesn't have to be a melee weapon, so you could use the feature on a +1 longbow, for instance. Once the bond is formed, the magic weapon appears whenever you call your pact weapon to you, and the intent is that you can't change the magic weapon's form when it appears. For example, if you bond with a flame tongue (longsword) and send the weapon to the feature's extradimensional space, the weapon comes back as a longsword when you summon it. You don't get to turn it into a club. Similarly, if you bond with a dagger of venom, you can't summon it as a maul; it's always a dagger.

The feature initially allows the conjuring forth of a melee weapon, yet we allow more versatility when it comes to magic weapons. We didn't want a narrow focus in this feature to make a warlock unhappy when a variety of magic weapons appear in a campaign. Does this versatility extend outside the melee theme of the feature? It sure does, but we're willing to occasionally bend a design concept if doing so is likely to increase a player's happiness.

Can a rogue use Sneak Attack more than once per round?

Yes, but no more than once per turn. In combat, a round comprises the turns of the combatants (see the Player's Handbook, p. 189). Many features in the game, such as Extra Attack, specify that they work only on your turn. The Sneak Attack description specifies that you can use the feature once per turn, but it's not limited to your turn. The feature also doesn't limit the number of times you can use it in a round.

This rule is relevant because you sometimes get a chance to use Sneak Attack on someone else's turn. The most common way for this to happen is when a foe provokes an opportunity attack from you. If the requirements for Sneak Attack are met, your opportunity attack can benefit from that feature. Similarly, a fighter could use Commander's Strike to grant you an attack on the fighter's turn, and if the attack qualifies, it can use Sneak Attack. Both of those options rely on your reaction, so you could do only one of them in a round.

Because of getting only one reaction per round, you're unlikely to use Sneak Attack more than twice in a round: once with your action and once with your reaction.



What happens if a druid wears metal armor?

The druid explodes. Well, not actually. Druids have a taboo against wearing metal armor and wielding a metal shield. The taboo has been part of the class's story since the class first appeared in *Eldritch Wizardry* (1976) and the original *Player's Handbook* (1978). The idea is that druids prefer to be protected by animal skins, wood, and other natural materials that aren't the worked metal that is associated with civilization. Druids don't lack the ability to wear metal armor. They choose not to wear it. This choice is part of their identity as a mystical order. Think of it in these terms: a vegetarian can eat meat, but the vegetarian chooses not to.

A druid typically wears leather, studded leather, or hide armor, and if a druid comes across scale mail made of a material other than metal, the druid might wear it. If you feel strongly about your druid breaking the taboo and donning metal, talk to your DM. Each class has story elements mixed with its game features; the two types of design go hand-in-hand in D&D, and the story parts are stronger in some classes than in others. Druids and paladins have an especially strong dose of story in their design. If you want to depart from your

class's story, your DM has the final say on how far you can go and still be considered a member of the class. As long as you abide by your character's proficiencies, you're not going to break anything in the game system, but you might undermine the story and the world being created in your campaign.

COMBAT

How do I know which ability modifier to use with an attack roll and its damage roll?

The Player's Handbook specifies which ability modifier to use with an attack roll (p. 194) and which one to use with the corresponding damage roll (p. 196). Here's a summary:

Attack Type

Melee weapon attack

Ranged weapon attack

Spell attack

Attack Roll

Strength mod.*

Dexterity mod.*

Spellcasting ability mod.**

Damage Roll

Strength mod.

Dexterity mod.

Depends on effect

* Add your proficiency bonus if you're using a weapon with which you're proficient.

**** Add your proficiency bonus.** Your spellcasting ability is determined by your class or whatever feature gave you the ability to make the spell attack.

For example, if you make a melee weapon attack with a longsword, you add your Strength modifier to the attack and damage rolls of the attack. In contrast, if you make the spell attack of the fire bolt cantrip, you add your spellcasting ability modifier to the attack roll. If you're a wizard, Intelligence is your spellcasting ability, so add your Intelligence modifier. Fire bolt doesn't tell you to add your modifier to its damage roll, though, so you don't.

Various features in the game make explicit exceptions to the rule. For example, a weapon that has the finesse property lets you choose whether to use your Strength or Dexterity modifier with it. Another example: when you use the two-weapon fighting option in the Player's Handbook (p. 195), you don't add your ability modifier to the damage of the bonus attack, unless that modifier is negative. You do, however, still add your ability modifier to the attack roll, since the option doesn't tell you not to. In other words, you follow the general rule until an exception in the game tells you not to.

What about unusual cases like the green-flame blade spell? The spell, which appears in the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide, tells you to make a melee attack with a weapon. Look at the table above, and you see that, under normal circumstances, you use your Strength modifier when you make a melee weapon attack. It doesn't matter that a spell told you to attack. If a spell expects you to make a spell attack, the spell's description says so. For examples, take a look at fire bolt and ray of frost. Both say it—"spell attack."

SPELLCASTING

Does the rule on casting a bonus action spell apply when you take a bonus action granted by a spell?

The rule on casting a spell as a bonus action (see PH, 202) applies only on the turn you cast the spell. For example, spiritual weapon can be cast as a bonus action, and it lasts for 1 minute. On the turn you cast it, you can't cast another spell before or after it, unless that spell is a cantrip with a casting time of 1 action. Until spiritual weapon

ends, it gives you the option of controlling its spectral weapon as a bonus action. That bonus action does not involve casting a spell, despite the fact that it's granted by a spell, so you can control the weapon and cast whatever spell you like on the same turn.

SPELLS

Can you use green-flame blade and booming blade with Extra Attack, opportunity attacks, Sneak Attack, and other weapon attack options?

Introduced in the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide, the green-flame blade and booming blade spells pose a number of questions, because they each do something unusual: require you to make a melee attack with a weapon as part of the spell's casting.

First, each of these spells involves a normal melee weapon attack, not a spell attack, so you use whatever ability modifier you normally use with the weapon. (A spell tells you if it includes a spell attack, and neither of these spells do.) For example, if you use a longsword with green-flame blade, you use your Strength modifier for the weapon's attack and damage rolls.

Second, neither green-flame blade nor booming blade works with Extra Attack or any other feature that requires the Attack action. Like other spells, these cantrips require the Cast a Spell action, not the Attack action, and they can't be used to make an opportunity attack, unless a special feature allows you to do so.

Third, these weapon attacks work with Sneak Attack if they fulfill the normal requirements for that feature. For example, if you have the Sneak Attack feature and cast green-flame blade with a finesse weapon, you can deal Sneak Attack damage to the target of the weapon attack if you have advantage on the attack roll and hit.

Does moonbeam deal damage when you cast it? What about when its effect moves onto a creature?

The answer to both questions is no. Here's some elaboration on that answer.

Some spells and other game features create an area of effect that does

something when a creature enters that area for the first time on a turn or when a creature starts its turn in that area. The turn you cast such a spell, you're primarily setting up hurt for your foes on later turns. Moonbeam, for example, creates a beam of light that can damage a creature who enters the beam or who starts its turn in the beam.

Here are some spells with the same timing as moonbeam for their areas of effect:

blade barrier

cloudkill

cloud of daggers

Evard's black tentacles

forbiddance

sleet storm

spirit guardians

Reading the description of any of those spells, you might wonder whether a creature is considered to be entering the spell's area of effect if the area is created on the creature's space. And if the area of effect can be moved—as the beam of moonbeam can—does moving it into a creature's space count as the creature entering the area? Our design intent for such spells is this: a creature enters the area of effect when the creature passes into it. Creating the area of effect on the creature or moving it onto the creature doesn't count. If the creature is still in the area at the start of its turn, it is subjected to the area's effect.

Entering such an area of effect needn't be voluntary, unless a spell says otherwise. You can, therefore, hurl a creature into the area with a spell like thunderwave. We consider that clever play, not an imbalance, so hurl away! Keep in mind, however, that a creature is subjected to such an area of effect only the first time it enters the area on a turn. You can't move a creature in and out of it to damage it over and over again on the same turn.

In summary, a spell like moonbeam affects a creature when the

creature passes into the spell's area of effect and when the creature starts its turn there. You're essentially creating a hazard on the battlefield.



Can you use dispel magic to dispel a magical effect like a vampire's Charm ability?

Dispel magic has a particular purpose: to break other spells. It has no effect on a vampire's Charm ability or any other magical effect that isn't a spell. It also does nothing to the properties of a magic item. It can, however, end a spell cast from a magic item or from another source. Spells—they're what dispel magic is about. For example, if you cast dispel magic on a staff of power, the spell fails to disrupt the staff's magical properties, but if the staff's wielder casts hold monster from the staff, dispel magic can end that spell if cast on the target of hold monster.

There are abilities and other spells that can end or suspend magical effects that aren't spells. For example, the greater restoration spell can end a charm effect of any sort on a target (such as a vampire's Charm or a dryad's Fey Charm), and a paladin's Aura of Devotion

can prevent or suspend such an effect.

Three of the most versatile spells for ending certain magical effects are lesser restoration, greater restoration, and remove curse.

Can you use dispel magic on the creations of a spell like animate dead or affect those creations with antimagic field?

Whenever you wonder whether a spell's effects can be dispelled or suspended, you need to answer one question: is the spell's duration instantaneous? If the answer is yes, there is nothing to dispel or suspend. Here's why: the effects of an instantaneous spell are brought into being by magic, but the effects aren't sustained by magic (see PH, 203). The magic flares for a split second and then vanishes. For example, the instantaneous spell animate dead harnesses magical energy to turn a corpse or a pile of bones into an undead creature. That necromantic magic is present for an instant and is then gone. The resulting undead now exists without the magic's help. Casting dispel magic on the creature can't end its mockery of life, and the undead can wander into an antimagic field with no adverse effect.

Another example: cure wounds instantaneously restores hit points to a creature. Because the spell's duration is instantaneous, the restoration can't be later dispelled. And you don't suddenly lose hit points if you step into an antimagic field!

In contrast, a spell like conjure woodland beings has a non-instantaneous duration, which means its creations can be ended by dispel magic and they temporarily disappear within an antimagic field.

Can you ready dispel magic to stop another spell from taking effect?

The easiest way to stop a spell is to cast counterspell on its caster while it's being cast. If successful, counterspell interrupts the other spell's casting, and that spell fails to take effect. Counterspell works against any spell, regardless of a spell's casting time or duration.

With the Ready action, dispel magic can be cast in response to another spell being cast, yet dispel magic can't substitute for counterspell. The main reason is that dispel magic removes a spell that is already on a target, whether that target is a creature, an object, or some other phenomenon. Dispel magic can't pre-dispel something.

If a spell isn't already present on a target, dispel magic does nothing to that target. The best that a readied dispel magic can do is dispel a spell immediately after it's been cast to prevent it from having any effect after the action used to cast it. For example, on your turn you could say something like this: "I ready dispel magic, and if the high priest casts a spell on anyone, I cast dispel magic on the target if the spell takes hold." If the high priest then cast hold person on your companion who fails the save against it, you could unleash your readied dispel magic and end hold person.

Can you use a shield with mage armor?

Mage armor works with a shield. Shields are grouped with armor in the equipment rules in the Player's Handbook, but various game features distinguish between the armor you wear and a shield you wield. Take a look at the monk's Unarmored Defense feature and compare it to the barbarian's version to see what I mean. In the monk's version, you must both forgo wearing armor and forgo wielding a shield if you want to benefit from the feature, whereas a barbarian must only forgo wearing armor.

MONSTERS

Is the breath weapon of a dragon magical?

If you cast antimagic field, don armor of invulnerability, or use another feature of the game that protects against magical or nonmagical effects, you might ask yourself, "Will this protect me against a dragon's breath?" The breath weapon of a typical dragon isn't considered magical, so antimagic field won't help you but armor of invulnerability will.

You might be thinking, "Dragons seem pretty magical to me." And yes, they are extraordinary! Their description even says they're magical. But our game makes a distinction between two types of magic:

The background magic that is part of the D&D multiverse's physics and the physiology of many D&D creatures

The concentrated magical energy that is contained in a magic item or channeled to create a spell or other focused magical effect

In D&D, the first type of magic is part of nature. It is no more dispellable than the wind. A monster like a dragon exists because of that magic-enhanced nature. The second type of magic is what the rules are concerned about. When a rule refers to something being magical, it's referring to that second type. Determining whether a game feature is magical is straightforward. Ask yourself these questions about the feature:

Is it a magic item?

Is it a spell? Or does it let you create the effects of a spell that's mentioned in its description?

Is it a spell attack?

Does its description say it's magical?

If your answer to any of those questions is yes, the feature is magical.

Let's look at a white dragon's Cold Breath and ask ourselves those questions. First, Cold Breath isn't a magic item. Second, its description mentions no spell. Third, it's not a spell attack. Fourth, the word "magical" appears nowhere in its description. Our conclusion: Cold Breath is not considered a magical game effect, even though we know that dragons are amazing, supernatural beings.

MAGIC ITEMS

Do magic weapons give you a bonus to attack and damage rolls?

A magic weapon gives you a bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls only if its description says it does. Every magic weapon can bypass resistances and immunities to damage from nonmagical attacks, but only certain magic weapons are more accurate and damaging than their nonmagical counterparts. For example, a +1 longsword and a giant slayer both give you a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls, whereas neither a flame tongue nor a frost brand provides such a bonus. All four weapons, however, can bypass an earth elemental's resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.

In short, a bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls is considered a special property of a magic weapon, not something that all magic weapons provide automatically.

Sage Advice Compendium

The Sage Advice Compendium gathers every installment of Sage Advice in one PDF. It's been updated to include this month's questions and answers.

Visit these [D&D reference documents](#) for more clarifications:

[Basic Rules](#) for Dungeons & Dragons

D&D Spell List ([version 1.01](#))

Monsters by Challenge Rating

([version 1.0](#))

D&D Monsters by Type ([version 1.0](#))

Magic Items by Rarity ([version 1.0](#))

Conversions to 5th Edition D&D

([version 1.0](#))

And visit the [Character Sheet webpage](#) for blank character sheets, as well as pre-generated characters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy Crawford is the co-lead designer of fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons. He was the lead designer of the fifth edition Player's Handbook and one of the leads on the Dungeon Master's Guide. He has worked on many other D&D books since coming to Wizards of the Coast in 2007.

If you have questions for a future installment of Sage Advice, please send them to sageadvice@wizards.com, or reach him on Twitter ([@JeremyECrawford](#)), where he answers questions between installments of this column.

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Tavern Tales

Mike Mearls and Chris Lindsay highlight a few of the best articles to appear in the Dungeon Masters Guild.

The **Dungeon Masters Guild** is a website that allows fans to post and sell their own D&D creations, including new material for the Forgotten Realms. We've already seen an overwhelming response to the site, and we can't wait to see where the community takes it. This month, Tavern Tales follows up with some of the authors of the articles we previously highlighted on the website, as they describe the creation of these new resources—from a macabre modification of the spellcasting system to three short, focused scenarios ready to drop into your game.

BLOOD MAGIC

Designed by Joshua Raynack, published by [Alea Publishing Group](#).
Buy the PDF [here](#).

MIKE MEARLS:

“Once we incorporated the concept of Hit Dice into the game, using them to heal during a short rest, we took care to avoid giving players other ways to use Hit Dice. That design direction was driven by a sense that players would burn through Hit Dice to boost themselves for a single fight, trading away success now at the cost of running short of hit points later.

Blood Magic dives into the idea of using Hit Dice as a character resource, and it does so in an evocative, fun way. In seven packed pages, this PDF provides an overview of blood magic—a practice that allows a caster to trade life essence away for power. The blood magic arcane tradition and the king’s blood sorcerous origin allow you to incorporate this practice into your campaign.

“These mechanics give a wizard or sorcerer character a creepy, macabre edge—perfect for a group running the Curse of Strahd adventure. Wizards with the blood magic tradition can inflict wounds upon themselves that drain their Hit Dice. In return, they gain blood points that improve their defenses, allow them to detect living creatures, and lace their spells with additional psychic damage. Sorcerers of the king’s blood origin can capture the life spark of a fallen enemy, gaining a benefit dependent on the type of creature defeated. For example, slaying a dragon allows a character to gain advantage on a saving throw, while defeating an elemental grants a bonus to AC. A set of four new magic items rounds out the package, including the potion of cruor, which restores spent Hit Dice, and the cursed sanguine blade, which compels its wielder to finish off wounded foes.

“This fusion of flavor and mechanics is a good example of taking a thematic element of a campaign and expressing it as a new option for different character classes. Although designed for the Forgotten Realms setting, this product easily adapts into the Ravenloft setting

or your favorite campaign.”

“The overall response to *Blood Magic* has been phenomenal,” says creator Josh Raynack. “As a Dungeon Master, I like the idea of players making hard choices for their characters in order to thwart evil and to have heroes struggle with internal conflict. It makes for good roleplaying. *Blood Magic* is an extension of that theme because it requires a sacrifice on the part of the character as well as providing a temptation for greater power. Both are essential in creating a memorable hero.

“I also delight in the concept of exploring the evolution of magic from its primitive beginnings. History adds a great dimension to a campaign setting, making it easier for players to immerse themselves and add depth to their character. I felt if characters were able to choose primordial blood magic over the more practiced arcane traditions, it would create dynamic interactions within a campaign.”

Raynack praised the Dungeon Masters Guild for its ability to take a new game mechanic and test its resilience. “I often do not have the luxury to devote hours upon hours to playtesting. So the DMG and its community support and feedback is a powerhouse for part-time game designers like myself. While the criticism can be mixed, it is also welcomed.”

The feedback and suggestions have already lead to changes, and he says they will continue to guide future updates. “If possible, I would like to explore options for all the character classes in one form or another. With community support, I hope it evolves into the definitive blood magic guide. In the end, I want a balanced product for gamers to enjoy and one that enhances their roleplay experience.”



BOOK OF BEASTS: DEMON DEPOSITORY

Design by Jonathan Leitheusser. Buy the PDF [here](#).

MIKE MEARLS:

“The Demon Depository is for those looking to add a few new chaotic fiends to their campaign. It updates a number of classic demons, making them an ideal resource for Out of the Abyss, or any campaign with an abyssal edge.

“This volume provides stats for the blood demon, the bulezau, the fire demon, the maw demon, the rutterkin, and the scion of Zuggtmoy. The implementation of the maw demon here does a great job of capturing its essence. Its most notable asset is a set of snapping jaws, which distract opponents. This grants advantage to the demon’s allies, so a small pack of maw demons make perfect sidekicks for a powerful demon or cult.

“All the demons in this volume have similar flourishes, drawing on their fourth edition design but elegantly bringing that design forward to fifth edition. If your group loves a tactical challenge, this is a great volume to supplement your roster of monsters.

“ Book of Beasts: Demon Depository contains six demons drawn from previous editions. Each includes background and information to

make them useful to DMs running games with a fiendish bent—and each demon has a challenge rating different than those offered in the Monster Manual. The demons are: maw demon (CR 1/2); rutterkin (CR 3); bulezau (CR 7); Scion of Zugtmoy (CR 10); blood demon (CR 11); and fire demon (CR 14). Use these demons in your ongoing campaign, in one-shots, as wandering monsters, or to spice up encounters with something new and different!”

“I heard about the Dungeon Masters Guild and decided to write up a bunch of D&D monsters and demons that hadn’t been translated to fifth edition yet,” creator Jonathan Leitheusser tells *Dragon+*. “I used the art provided by Wizards of the Coast on the site and whipped up a couple of PDFs. I’d already been playing around with writing up some monsters for my own D&D game, so it didn’t take long at all. However, I was much more careful about these since they were going up for sale instead of just being used in my home game!”

Leitheusser says some of the monsters’ abilities from previous editions were easy to recreate, while others were a bit trickier. He used powers and abilities that already existed in the *Monster Manual* and other adventures to update them for D&D fifth edition.

Don’t be surprised to see that *Book of Beasts* title applied to other creatures in the future. “That’s my plan, to give a similar treatment to other classic monsters. In fact, at the same time I released the *Demon Depository*, I also released the *Book of Beasts: Underdark Vault*. Since *Out of the Abyss* keeps the characters in the depths for most of its adventure, I figured some more monsters in an underground setting could help DMs spice things up. Plus, I really liked writing up the choker, iron cobra, iron defender, the kruthik, and the skeletal tomb guardian. They’re some of my favorite monsters from earlier editions.”



BATTLE FOR THE UNDERCITY

Written by **Monica Valentinelli**. Buy the PDF [here](#).

MIKE MEARLS:

“Every DM needs a quick adventure now and then, and Battle for the Undercity features three short, focused scenarios to drop into your game. Eminently adaptable to any D&D setting, it describes a section of labyrinthine sewer tunnels, stocking them with three distinct groups of villains.

“Each separate three-to-four hour mission matches the characters against a different group. The nice thing about this approach is that it makes prep easy. By reading over the map and key, you’re ready to run three different scenarios for your group. The factions are also detailed enough that you can drop them into your campaign as an ongoing menace.

“As well as a map to the Undercity and a location guide, the adventures contain details of the new Crimson Coins thieves’ faction, the Ten Legs tribe and Goblin Beast-Master (with beast-rider monster variants), and a variant on the ancient revenant. While it was designed for characters of levels 7-9, notes allow DMs to adjust the missions to increase or decrease their difficulty and length.

“As someone running a city-based campaign at the moment, I found this format easy to pick up and a great way to bolster my stock of off-the-cuff material. I hope this format catches on. It’ll make many DMs’ lives easier.”

“Because I work on a lot of games either as a developer or as a writer, I tend to prefer scenarios that can be run in one-to-three sessions as opposed to a campaign. I enjoy swooping down on goblins and other beasties to save the day with my gaming group. Parts of *Battle for the Undercity* came out of those experiences,” says creator Monica Valentinelli, who has also worked on the *Firefly* RPG, *Vampire: the Masquerade 20th Anniversary Edition*, and *Hunter the Vigil 2nd Edition*.

“I included goblins, because they’ve always been a part of my *D&D* fifth edition experiences to some degree, but I didn’t want to do that without adding a new twist. What could be scarier than goblins training giant spiders to fight underground alongside them? From that starting point, I focused on what I felt would not only be fun for me, but for other fans who enjoy a different theme or style of play.”

While it’s a tough question, Valentinelli does eventually manage to choose one element of *Battle for the Undercity* as her favorite. “I enjoyed writing about the different pieces for separate reasons. The Ten Legs tribe was fun, for example, because it was a new twist on existing material—and I love those kinds of challenges. The Crimson Coins faction, on the other hand, I wrote with a sense of dread. I was worried the faction was a bit too dark, but I kept thinking about how much satisfaction players might feel once they dealt with them,” she says. “But if I absolutely had to pick a favorite, it’d be the ancient revenant monster variant and that entire adventure. I had to stop myself from writing fiction based on the idea, because the potential for a larger story arc exploded in my mind.”

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Streaming Highlights

Dice, Camera, Action kicks off a new campaign led by Chris Perkins, the D&D art team goes green, and office life mirrors game life in Rolling High.

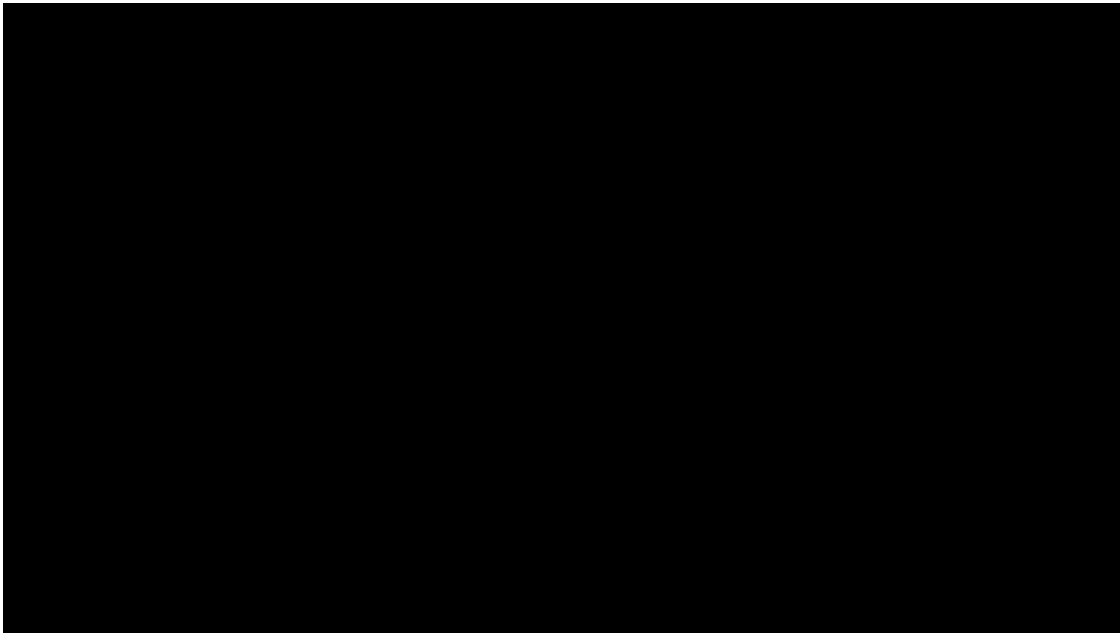


DICE, CAMERA, ACTION

The latest D&D livestream sees DM extraordinaire Chris Perkins lead four adventurers through the *Curse of Strahd* storyline. Join streamers/YouTubers Holly Conrad (CommanderHolly), Jared Knabenbauer (ProJared), Anna Prosser Robinson (Misscliks), and Nathan Sharp (NateWantsToBattle) as they tussle with the Count's cohorts. Can this warlock, rogue, paladin, and bard survive the Barovian nightmare?

The smart move is to subscribe to D&D on [Twitch](#) and watch *Dice, Camera, Action* every Tuesday from 4-6pm PDT (we recommend tuning in early to see the mesmerizing dancing illithid). Missed an

episode? Catch up on the official D&D YouTube account.



INSIDE ART DEVELOPMENT

Anyone who's ever wanted an exclusive peek inside the D&D art department hit the jackpot in April, and what a day for the cameras to be rolling! This magical world faces some complex issues, and the veteran team grappled with a problem that might have overwhelmed other, *greener* staff members. Did we mention this was April 1, 2016?

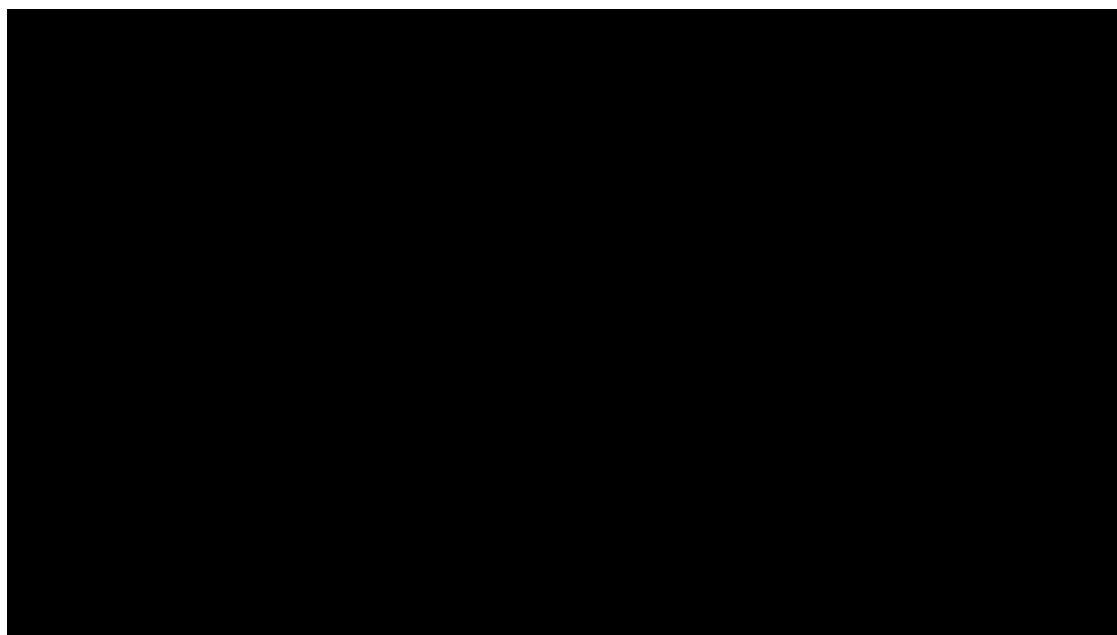
THE OFFICIAL DUNGEONS & DRAGONS PODCAST

Comic artist Jim Zub dialed into the Official D&D Podcast ([subscribe on iTunes now!](#)), to chat with Greg Tito and Trevor kid about his latest D&D comic, which takes Minsc, Boo, and their party deep inside Ravenloft. The *Legends of Baldur's Gate* author also shared an admission about comic sans which is more shocking than anything Strahd's domain of dread could throw up!

[Listen Now](#)

ROLLING HIGH

This 2012 Indiegogo-funded series is finally available for all to enjoy online. The six-episode comedy drama follows Brian Wexler (Mark Whitten) and his coworkers at the advertising firm AdVeritas, as he tries to get his new ideas accepted by upper management. As office life begins to bleed into game life, Brian finds he has to deal with a hideous half ogre/half troll and bring his party together if he is to defeat the powerful ice queen. With solid support from the rest of the cast, each of the characters gets their moment to shine in a very polished, professional show. We suggest catching the bonus *Episode 0: Character Creation* before binge-watching the rest of the series.



HIGH ROLLERS

Spotted Yogscast regular Chris Trott, AKA Trottimus, guesting on an episode of *Dice, Camera, Action* in April? Check out his super-popular UK-based game which streams live every Sunday on [Twitch](#) or catch up with their antics at a more US-friendly time on [the High Rollers YouTube channel](#).



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OFFICIAL D&D CONTENT

PREP LESS. PLAY MORE.



Fantasy Grounds
Virtual RPG Tabletop Application

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Furious Game of Drawing Comics. His favorite things to draw are landscapes, plants, reptiles and amphibians.

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Visit beautiful Barovia in...

CURSE OF STRAHD

A Dungeons & Dragons campaign for levels 1-10
By Christopher Perkins with Tracy and Laura Hickman

FACT: Barovia is approximately 216 square miles (12 m. x 18 m.), slightly larger than Andorra but with many more monsters

START

Comrades! Let us forget how we came to be lost in this dark forest or who is to blame! We must work together! As your paladin, I propose we shelter in yonder castle! Let's go, rogue, cleric, bard, fighter, wizard, ranger, barbarian and warlock!

1 HEARING WOLVES NEARBY, HEROES PRAISE THEIR FORESIGHT IN HAVING PREVIOUSLY ACQUIRED SILVER ARROWS, SILVER SWORD, SILVER THIEVES' TOOLS AND SILVER NUNCHAKU.

2 ADVENTURERS ENTER BAROVIA TOWN, WHERE IGNORANT BAROVIANS GAPE AT "SCAT-MAN" CRAWLOCK AND "GRAY-SKINNED FIG-MAN" (FIGHTER). ROGUE VISITS THE GENERAL STORE, WHERE A 10-FOOT POLE COSTS AN OUTRAGEOUS 5 SILVER PIECES.

3 ROGUE IS THROWN OUT OF GENERAL STORE BY STOREKEEPER'S 12-HIT-POINT NEPHEW. PALADIN MEETS IREENA KOLYANA, WHO IS TROUBLED BY STRANGE DREAMS AND TWO SMALL PUNCTURE WOUNDS ON HER NECK EVERY NIGHT (RANGER DIAGNOSES CAUSE AS TWIN STINGS).

4 IREENA TELLS PALADIN HER LAND IS RULED BY THE VAMPIRE STRAHD, WHO DWELLS IN RAVENLOFT CASTLE. PALADIN OFFERS THE PARTY'S HELP TO FIGHT HIS TYRANNY. THE VILLAGE PRIEST IS ENCOURAGING, BUT SECRETLY CLEARS OUT TO GRAVES.

5 MADAME EVA PREDICTS THE HEROES WILL DEFEAT STRAHD WITH THE HELP OF "A WOMAN WITH TWO LEFT FEET." IREENA BOASTS SHE CAN'T DANCE. BARD BEATS VISTANI MUSICIAN AT GUITAR CONTEST AND RUBS IT IN. VISTANI CURSES HIM "ONLY WITH A MOUTH ORGAN SHALL THEE SING".

6 RANGER DISCOVERS BAG OF CLOTHES IN WOODS AND TAKES IT. ANNOYED WEREWOLF VOWS VENGEANCE.

7 BARBARIAN, WHO IS FROM A PRE-HORSE-RIDING CULTURE, EATS THE CARRIAGE HORSES.

8 HEROES ENTER CASTLE AND ARE SWARMED BY VAMPIRE SPAWN. MONK IS TORN TO BITS. IREENA FALLS 1000' OFF THE DRAWBRIDGE BUT IS PROBABLY OK BECAUSE SHE'S AN IMPORTANT NPC.

9 FLEEING INTO THE WOODS, ASHAMED BY THEIR DEFEAT, HEROES RESCUE YOUNG GIRL FROM EVIL FISHERMAN.

10 HEROES LEAVE YOUNG GIRL IN THE CARE OF A KINDLY OLD PASTRY SELLER.

11 WANTING MORE DONUT HOLES, RANGER TRACKS PASTRY SELLER TO HER BAKERY AND DISCOVERS THE HORRIBLE TRUTH. HEROES KILL THE CHILD-EATING HAGS, FIGHTING KNEE-DEEP IN DOUGH, DEMON ICHOR AND HUNDREDS OF FROGS.

12 HEROES VISIT THE MAD MAGE OF MT. BARATOK. WIZARD CRITICIZES MAGE'S CASTING OF THE SPELL "MORDENKAINEN'S MAGNIFICENT MANSION".

13 ROGUE DISCOVERS SILVER MAKES BAD THIEVES' TOOLS WHEN HE TRIGGERS A TRAP, MAKING VAN RICHTEIN'S TOWER EXPLODE. BARBARIAN SHELTERS FROM RUBBLE IN WAGON, WHICH ALSO BLOWS UP. ALL THE NOISE ATTRACTS WEREWOLVES.

14 FIGHTER CHECKS IN AT THE BLUE WATER INN, WHERE HE IS DISTURBED TO FIND THE MINIBRIDGE FULL OF GRUBS, SEEDS AND HORSE EYEBALLS.

15 THE ADVENTURERS ARE RELIEVED TO REACH VALLAKI, WHERE THE HOUSES ARE 60% LESS LIKELY THAN IN BAROVIA TO BE INHABITED BY RAT SWARMS. THE BARON INVITES THE OUTSIDERS TO BE GUEST JUDGES AT THE ANNUAL PAINT THE SUN HOW YOU IMAGINE IT! ART FESTIVAL.

16 HEROES CONFRONT BABA LYSAGA, STRAHD'S NURSEMAID. WIZARD USES "UNSEEN SERVANT" TO FREE LYSAGA'S GOATS, DISTRACTING HER LONG ENOUGH FOR PALADIN TO SLAY HER. RANGER IS KILLED BY ZOMBIES STUFFED WITH POISONOUS SNAKES.

17 PALADIN PRAYS AT ARGYNOSTHOTL, BUT HER EMPTY PRAYERS GO UNHEARD.

18 BARD TRIES TO BURN DOWN VISTANI CAMP IN REVENGE FOR MAKING HIM A HARMONICA PLAYER. VISTANI CATCH HIM AND GIVE HIM A SECOND CURSE: TO SLIP AND FUMBLE AT THE WORST POSSIBLE TIME.

19 PALADIN AND FIGHTER FIGHT OFF THE WEREWOLVES WITH SILVER SWORDS. BARD DOES HIS PART TO HELP BY PLAYING BING CROSBY'S "QUICKSILVER".

20 ABBOT OF KREZK OFFERS TO RESURRECT DEAD HEROES IF THEY FIND A WEDDING DRESS FOR HIS BRIDE VASILKA. CLERIC OF WEE JAS USES HIS SHROUD-MAKING SKILLS TO SEW SOMETHING TASTEFUL.

21 ROGUE AND BARBARIAN COME BACK TO LIFE NO WORSE FOR WEAR, APART FROM A FAINT CRUMPLED LOCK.

22 DUE TO HER COMPULSIVE THREAD-PLUCKING, VASILKA IS REVEALED AS A FLESH GOLEM! REALIZING SHE IS THE WOMAN WITH TWO LEFT FEET, THE HEROES ASK HER TO JOIN THEM, BUT THE MAD ABBOT REFUSES TO ALLOW IT AND ATTACKS WITH A HORDE OF 132 MONGRELFOLK.

23 VASILKA DECLARES HER INTENTION TO JOIN THE PARTY BY PLUCKING OFF THE ABBOT'S LIMBS.

24 TIRED OF THEIR LOCAL BEET WINE AND TURNIP BEER, THE PEOPLE OF KREZK BEG THE ADVENTURERS TO BRING THEM WINE FROM THE NEARBY WINERY.

25 WINEMAKERS PROMISE A CASE OF THEIR BEST WINE (AND, ODDLY, MORE HORSE EYEBALLS) IF THE HEROES DEFEAT THE EVIL DRUIDS. RECOGNIZING WARLOCK AS A VIRGIN, DRUIDS TRY TO SACRIFICE HIM INSIDE A WICKER STRAHD STATUE, BUT BARD SAVES HIM WITH AN X-RATED ILLUSION.

26 THE GIANT GOAT SANGZOR HEAD-BUTTS BARBARIAN OFF CLIFF IN REVENGE FOR QUADRUPEDS EVERYWHERE.

27 THE HEROES REACH THE DREADED AMBER TEMPLE. WARLOCK SELLS HIS SOUL FOR SKELETAL WINGS, OILY BLACK FUR, AND SIX FINGERS. CLERIC FINDS THE "TOME OF STRAHD," STRAHD'S SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK ABOUT HIS TRAGIC LOVE FOR TATYANA (HER NAME IS CROSSED OUT AND REPLACED WITH "IREENA").

28 SENSING WARLOCK MOKING HIS BOOK, STRAHD IS SO MAD HE PORTS TO THE TEMPLE AND DISMEMBERS HIM. BUT THIS TIME, THE HEROES ARE ABLE TO FIGHT HIM OFF! STRAHD TURNS INTO A BAT AND FLEES, THEN FIREBALLS THE BRIDGE, TRAPPING THE PARTY ON MT. GHAKIS.

29 BARD CASTS "DOMINATE ROD" ON ROC OF MT. GHAKIS AND COMMANDS IT TO FLY THEM BACK TO BAROVIA TOWN. TRAGICALLY, VASILKA PLAYS WITH HER STITCHES IN MIDLIGHT AND COMES APART AT 20,000 FEET OVER THE MOUNTAINS.

30 AT BAROVIA TAVERN, BARD CONGRATULATES HIMSELF FOR BEATING THE CURSE WHILE THE SURVIVORS ENJOY A WELL-EARNED REST.

FINISH
Finally at level 10!
Tomorrow we storm the castle!
Let's drink that Champagne du le Stomp!

CONTINUED IN RAVENLOFT MAP

ART BY JASON THOMPSON @MOCKMAN

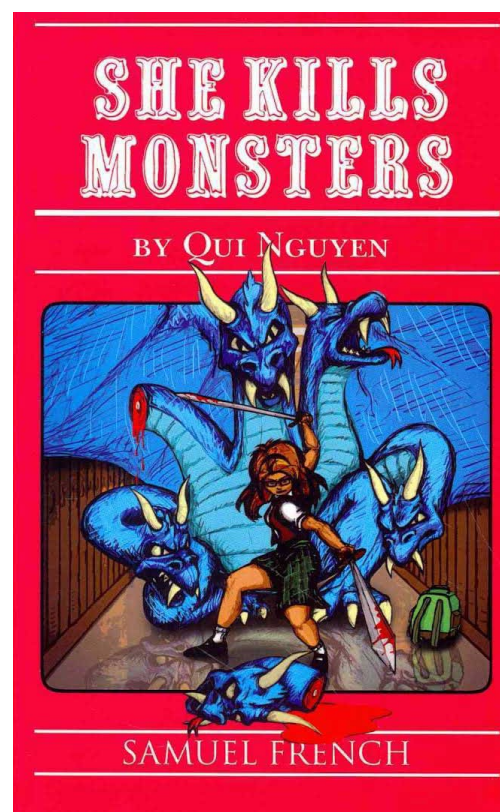
Next Issue: Dragon 08



Join us in *Dragon+* Issue 8, as we make like an intern and meet with the founding members of Acquisitions Incorporated. From the group's humble beginnings on an audio podcast to packed-out shows at the Penny Arcade Expos, this hardy set of adventurers have been at the heart of one of the most entertaining games of D&D since 2008.

We'll be opening the mail, fetching the drinks, and feeding the troll as legends Ominifis Hereward "Omin" Dran (Jerry Holkins), Binwin Bronzebottom (Scott Kurtz), and James Winifred "Jim" Darkmagic III (Mike Krahulik) tell us how their corporate group of plunderers has evolved. Plus, we'll have more details on the video web series Acquisitions Inc. will be kicking off this summer, following the announcement at PAX East.

We also take a look at *She Kills Monsters*, a fun new play from acclaimed young playwright Qui Nguyen. This comedic romp into the world of fantasy roleplaying games tells the story of Agnes Evans, as she leaves her childhood home in Ohio following the death of her teenage sister, Tilly. When Agnes finds Tilly's Dungeons & Dragons notebook, however, she stumbles into a journey of discovery and action-packed adventure in the imaginary world that was Tilly's refuge. Cue high-



octane dramatic comedy, laden with homicidal fairies, nasty ogres, and '90s pop culture, guaranteed to appeal to the geek and warrior within us all. Find all this and much, much more in *Dragon+* Issue 8, releasing in June!

DON'T FORGET YOUR DAILY D&D DELIVERIES

You may have finished this issue, but you can get the latest D&D updates, secrets and tips in this app's news feed every day.

Just tap the screen to bring up the menu, then hit the Menu button and go to Home or News to see the latest posts from D&D. Thanks for reading!

(Contents subject to change)

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A big thank you to the extended D&D family for
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Prolific D&D artist, Wayne England, passed away on February 9, 2016. He illustrated the image on page 10 of this issue, as well as numerous paintings for third, fourth, and fifth edition D&D. Here are a few words about Wayne from D&D art director Kate Irwin:

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